



PHD

The impact of ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals on Thai Higher Education Institutions

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The impact of ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals on Thai Higher Education Institutions

Paranin Jotikasthira

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath
Department of Education

November 2020

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Abstract

The policies, initiatives and activities of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been the subject of numerous analyses in academic literature. Much research focuses on the impact on particular sectors of the economic activities of ASEAN, such as the Free Trade Area and the free movement of skilled labour. However, little research has been developed concerning the impact of the free movement of professionals in Thailand. This research intends to contribute to the understanding of the impact of the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai HEIs as the production agent of Thai human resources. It also emphasises the changing roles and operations of Thai universities when facing the challenge of tourism professional mobility across the ASEAN region.

In this study, Powell and DiMaggio's (1983) theory of institutional isomorphism has been applied as the lens for understanding the changes in Thai HEIs. Other research, i.e. the work of Joo and Halx (2012), Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004), and Caravella (2011), are also applied in order to identify the key actors and to shape the conceptual framework of this research. The findings of the case-based research of three Thai HEIs revealed that Thai HEIs showed homogeneous responses toward the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Three isomorphic pressures – coercive, mimetic and normative – are found to exist. The findings suggest that the coercive and mimetic pressures serve as the stronger pressures in shaping the homogeneity of Thai HEIs. In the meantime, normative pressures serves as the secondary pressure. There is also an overlap between these three pressures.

One important explanation for the conformity of Thai HEI responses seems to be the feeling of uncertainty around the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. The lack of confidence in the Thai government also reduces the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the view of Thai HEIs. There is also a general lack of interest on the part of Thai HEIs in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Chapter 1 Introduction	13
1.1 Background of the research.....	13
1.2 ASEAN and its background	16
1.3 ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (ASEAN MRA) and ASEAN MRA on Tourism Professionals (ASEAN MRA-TP)	19
1.4 Thai Higher Education and ASEAN	24
1.5 Research objective and Questions	28
1.6 Research design	29
1.7 Contribution of research	30
1.8 Outline of this research.....	31
1.9 Chapter summary	32
Chapter 2 Education in Thailand	34
2.1 Education in Thailand.....	34
2.2 Development of Thai higher education	37
2.3 Types of Thai HEIs.....	40
2.4 Chapter summary.....	44
Chapter 3 Literature Review.....	45
3.1 ASEAN and Regional Integration.....	45
3.2 Internationalisation and Higher Education Regionalisation	56
3.3 Theory of Institutional Change	69
3.4 Chapter summary	81
Chapter 4 Research Methodology	82
4.1 Research Background and Problems	82
4.2 Philosophical perspectives	86
4.3 Research Approach.....	88

4.4	Research Method	89
4.5	Case study and participant selection	92
4.6	Data Collection	98
4.7	Data Analysis	104
4.8	Validity and Reliability.....	107
4.9	Ethical Considerations.....	108
4.10	Limitations of the Research	110
4.11	Chapter summary.....	110
Chapter 5	Research Findings	112
5.1	Introduction	112
5.2	Core themes.....	113
5.3	Institutional characteristics.....	117
5.4	Understanding the policy governance of the ASEAN MRA-TP ..	120
5.5	Case study 1: University A	124
5.6	Case study 2: University B	143
5.7	Case study 3: University C	159
5.8	Chapter summary.....	177
Chapter 6	Discussion of Findings	180
6.1	A summary of the key research findings.....	180
6.2	Cross-case research findings.....	183
6.3	Institutional isomorphism in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs	186
6.4	The connection between coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism in Thai HEIs.....	205
6.5	Chapter Summary	210
Chapter 7	Conclusion.....	213
7.1	Introduction	213
7.2	Key findings.....	214
7.3	Contribution To Knowledge	218
7.4	Implications of research.....	222
7.5	Limitations of the Study	224
7.6	Further research suggestion.....	227
7.7	Chapter Summary	228

List of References.....	230
Appendix A.....	264
Appendix B.....	269
Appendix C.....	271
Appendix D.....	272

List of Tables

Table 1: Job Titles and Six Common Labour Divisions of ASEAN MRA-TP ..	21
Table 2: The relationship between university autonomy and government role	41
Table 3: Categories of Higher Education Institutions under the Long-Term Plan	43
Table 4: Old Regionalism VS New Regionalism	48
Table 5: Method of data collection to be used in this research.....	85
Table 6: The main characteristics of the case study in the research	95
Table 7: The list of interviewees	97
Table 8: Important issues and their objectives	102
Table 9: Codes emerged from research findings	115
Table 10: The main characteristics of each case study in the research	118
Table 11: Cross-case Research findings.....	184

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Key Elements of ASEAN MRA-TP	22
Figure 2: Thai Education system	36
Figure 3: Organisation of administration in Education Service Areas	37
Figure 4: ASEAN Regional Education Cooperation Structure	66
Figure 5: The process of conducting qualitative research	91
Figure 6: The institutional isomorphism process in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs.....	206

List of Abbreviations

ACCSTP	ASEAN Common Competency Standard for Tourism Professionals
ACI	ASEAN Citation Index
ACTS	ASEAN Credit Transfer System
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AFAS	ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AIMS	ASEAN International Mobility for Students
APSC	ASEAN Political-Security Community
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ARC	ASEAN Research Cluster
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASA	Association of Southeast Asia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN MRA-TP	ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals
ASCC	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
ASED	ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education
ATPMC	ASEAN Tourism Professional Monitoring Committee
ATPRS	ASEAN Tourism Professional Registration System
ATQEM	ASEAN Tourism Qualifications Equivalency Matrix
AUN	ASEAN University Network
AUN QA	AUN Quality Assurance Network
CATC	Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum
CBT	Competency Based Training
CMI	Chiang Mai Initiative

CUPT	Council of University President Thailand
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Area
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GMS	Great Mekong Subregion
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOL	Ministry of Labours
MOTS	Ministry of Tourism and Sports
MOU	Memerandum of Understanding
MRA	Mutual Recognition Arrangement
MUA	Ministry of University Affairs
NTO	National Tourism Organisation
NTPB	National Tourism Professional Board
OBEC	Office of the Basic Education Commission
OEC	Office of the Education Council
OHEC	Office of the Higher Education Commission
ONESQA	Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment
OVEC	Office of the Vocational Education Commission
SEA	Southeast Asian
SEAMEO RIHED	The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Centres for Higher Education and Development
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
SOMED+3	ASEAN plus three Senior Official Meeting on Education
TPCB	Tourism Professional Certification Board

TQF	Thailand Qualification Framework for Higher Education
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction

In order to introduce the research clearly, the current chapter starts by explaining the reasons underpinning the choice of the current research topic by the researcher and its significance. Subsequently, the chapter introduces vital information related to this study – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals (MRA-TP), and the Thai higher education context – in order to understand the research phenomenon. Furthermore, the current section includes the research questions, brief information on the research design and its contributions to the field. Finally, it also provides a concise description of the details of each chapter of this study.

1.1 Background of the research

Over the last 20 years, globalisation has resulted in significant changes in societies around the world. The fundamental concepts of globalisation are borderlessness and mobility, which create considerable effects in many sectors and enhance emerging regional cooperation in many areas. The regional integration of Southeast Asian region is also influenced by globalisation, and it has brought changes and impacts to its member countries, including Thailand. Many of its strongest effects are also economical. The free movement of products and services, as well as skilled labour, require cooperation from all member countries. The focus of this research is on the mobility of skilled labour in tourism under the ASEAN MRA-TP and the preparation provided by the higher education sector.

This research intends to contribute to our understanding of the economic impacts resulting from the regional integration of the higher education sector in the ASEAN member countries. The main objective of this research is to explore how universities in Thailand have responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP and why they responded in the way they did. It investigates changes in the roles and operation of Thai universities when facing the challenges of mobility of tourism professionals across the ASEAN region. In this thesis, both external and internal factors, such as the ASEAN MRA-TP

process and regulations and university governance and budget allocation, are considered as challenges for Thai universities.

I developed an interest in the impact of ASEAN and its activities on the Thai higher education sector while working as a government officer in the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC). During this time, my job responsibility was to encourage bilateral and multilateral cooperation in higher education between Thailand and ASEAN member countries. According to my work experience, the role and significance of regional integration have gradually increased across the world as a response to globalisation. Thailand has been affected by the integration of ASEAN, and the organisation's activities have strongly impacted all sectors, including education. The education sector, especially higher education, must prepare for the challenges of the ASEAN as it is recognised as a foundation for strengthening the competitiveness of countries and the ASEAN community (ASEAN, 2008).

When considering the impact of ASEAN on higher education, the liberalisation of educational services and the free flow of skilled labour seem to have a powerful impact on the higher education sector. Educating Thai graduates so that they might compete with other workers across the ASEAN area and international labour requires the Thai higher education sector to be effectively prepared. The Thai government and OHEC were aware of this at an early stage and accordingly formulated various policies and strategies to respond to these challenges. These policies and strategies mainly focused on developing the quality and standards of graduates and supporting academic cooperation with ASEAN universities on bilateral and multilateral levels.

However, a key question is how a key stakeholder group, Thai universities, have implemented these policies and strategies to develop their role and operation in support of the ASEAN. As an officer in the policy agency for Thai higher education, I observed that OHEC recognises the importance of ASEAN and supports many academic activities related to it in order to strengthen the role of Thai higher education on the ASEAN platform. Hence, the support and efforts of Thai universities are required since they are the key to policy implementation. I continued to consider this question when I decided to pursue my Ph.D. I was interested in exploring the perception and response of Thai universities towards the work of the government, which was expected to benefit my workplace.

The policy implementation of Thai universities in response to the impact of ASEAN is intriguing, and it is also essential to consider the fact that ASEAN activity affects the roles and operations of Thai universities. As mentioned above, the free flow of skilled labour is considered one of the activities that most strongly affect the Thai higher education sector. An important goal of universities is to produce high-quality graduates who meet the needs of the labour market. Thai universities in the ASEAN region are also in agreement with this goal. However, the free labour mobility agreement under the ASEAN framework requires their attention. This ASEAN labour mobility agreement was developed in eight professional areas to strengthen regional integration and to improve the skill standards of ASEAN professionals. The agreement focuses on the free movement of tourism professionals, although it differs in terms of the implementation process and its effect on the ASEAN economy. While other agreements are concerned with regulated professionals having their standards of practice that require professional certification, ASEAN MRA-TP deals with unregulated jobs and focuses on competency standards. Except for educational qualification-holders, people who are interested in working in tourism and hospitality are obligated to possess the minimum standards required for every job type. Common competency standards and a common curriculum are also interesting factors in this agreement that might affect the operation of Thai universities.

Moreover, tourism is considered as a leading industry in many ASEAN countries, including Thailand. In the last few years, significant growth has been seen in worldwide tourism and the hospitality industry, especially in ASEAN countries. A report of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2017) revealed that Asia and the Pacific continent were ranked second in terms of the market share of international tourist arrivals in 2017, and 9.2% of the total market share of these continents was from ASEAN nations. Travel and tourism is the leading industry in ASEAN countries, including in Thailand, serving as a pillar for this specific country. Thailand has notably grown in terms of tourism receipts, to US\$50 billion (9.4% of total GDP) in 2017 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018) and was also ranked ninth in international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2017). Tourism and travel also directly supported more than 14 million jobs across the ASEAN region in 2017 (4.7% of total employment), with more than two million of these jobs based in Thailand (6.2% of total

employment (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018), which is expected to continue to rise every year.

For these reasons, the travel and tourism industry plays a significant role in the ASEAN and Thai economies, with the need for skilled labour also expected to increase. The ASEAN MRA-TP agreement encourages intense competition in the labour market in this sector. Although tourism seems to be related to practical training in a vocational area, Thai universities, as the agencies who are responsible for more than 50,000 students in tourism and hospitality area, are expected to understand this phenomenon and prepare themselves to support this agreement. Moreover, during the period of conducting this research, the live government policies towards this issue were observed to understand the success of policy implementation. Therefore, exploring the operations of Thai higher education institutions (HEIs) in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP is good to research, which could make a substantial contribution to many sectors in Thailand.

1.2 ASEAN and its background

ASEAN is a regional organisation of ten countries in the Southeast Asia region. It was originally formed in 1967 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by five member states, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand. Following a long period of development, it currently has ten member states: the five founding states along with Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos, with a total population of more than 600 million people (ASEAN, 2016). The primary purpose of ASEAN is to promote economic, social, and political cooperation for the prosperity and stability of member countries.

Before the inception of ASEAN, there were several attempts to create similar regional organisations (Narine, 2002). During the Cold War period, the communist regime controlled by Russia and China expanded and proliferated in Southeast Asia, especially in North Vietnam. It raised considerable concern in the United States, which intended to prevent communism and to expand its anti-communist power. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), signed by the United States, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, was created in 1954 to maintain security against the communist domination in Southeast Asia. However,

SEATO was not successful and was dissolved 22 years later due to internal conflict. Another significant regional integration in Southeast Asia was formed in 1961, named The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), since its memberships were entirely Southeast Asian States: Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. The main objective of ASA was to promote economic and cultural cooperation in the region (Turnbull, 1992, p.615; cited by Wunderlich, 2007). However, a territorial dispute between two of the member countries, Malaysia and the Philippines, over North Borneo took place two years after the foundation of ASA, that led to its becoming defunct. The institutional structure of ASA is considered as the foundation of ASEAN. After ASA, territorial conflicts continued to create more tension between other Southeast Asian states, and the need for regional integration in order to cope with this problem increased. Therefore, ASEAN was presented as a new organisation in this region.

ASEAN was ostensibly formed as an economic organisation while promoting regional stability through broader cooperation. Socioeconomic cooperation among member states was used as a crucial mechanism to counter external threats and to promote regional peace. Different from the European Union (EU) as a supranational organisation, ASEAN shows its own distinctive pattern in forming regional integration (Acharya, 2009; Jetschke and Murray, 2012). The uniqueness of ASEAN can be seen in its norms and governance. The 'ASEAN way' or 'a set of diplomatic norms shared by the member [states]' (Katsumata, 2003, p.104) was developed and presented as a code of conduct for ASEAN member states. Acharya (1997) explains the ASEAN way as soft regionalism, which focuses on consensus and consultation. The work of the ASEAN intergovernmental organisation is based on the principle of non-interference concerning the sovereignty of member states. Flexible coordination and consensual decision making are also critical concepts of ASEAN cooperation. Therefore, the cooperative activities under the ASEAN framework are a joint commitment among member states in order to ensure regional peace and stability.

After the signing of the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, ASEAN rapidly grew and expanded its activities to strengthen the roles of the regional organisation. At the ninth ASEAN Summit in 2003, the heads of the ASEAN member states agreed to establish an ASEAN Community by 2020, comprising of three pillars: political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. Each pillar has its blueprint for supporting the ASEAN community. The ASEAN political and security

community (APSC) is designed to counter threats and enhance the peace and stability of the region, together with democracy and human rights, through the principle of human security. The ASEAN socio-cultural community (ASCC) focuses on people-centred ideas, social sharing, and improvement in the quality of life. It strengthens the role of education as a mechanism for human and social development and also aims to build an ASEAN identity. Lastly, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) plays a significant role in promoting the ASEAN region's economies.

The four goals of AEC – being a single market and production base, being a highly competitive region, equitable development in the region, and full integration into the global economy – are outlined in the AEC blueprint and can be achieved through the liberalisation of trade in goods, services, and investment. These three main pillars are connected and mutually reinforced for ensuring the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region and the community. However, with the Cebu Declaration in 2007, the heads of ASEAN member states agreed to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015 as well as the establishment of the AEC to enhance the free movement of goods, services, investment and skilled labour, and the free flow of capital within the region (ASEAN, 2008).

Apart from the establishment of the ASEAN Community, foreign ministers of ASEAN member states agreed and endorsed the Charter of ASEAN at the 13th ASEAN Summit in 2007 and began to enforce it in 2008. The ASEAN Charter serves as the essential constitution of ASEAN in providing legal status, an intergovernmental organisation, and an institutional framework for ASEAN. It creates a legal framework and mechanism for the regional integration process and also establishes the formal pattern of the decision-making processes. With the legal status and the formality of work, the enforcement of the ASEAN Charter results in the reification of cooperation under ASEAN frameworks such as economic integration, equitable development, and transnational crime and security.

During the 48 years of its evolution, ASEAN has developed and improved relations among member countries in order to strengthen the community-building process. The integration of Southeast Asian countries is becoming a vital issue for countries both inside and outside the region. ASEAN has become one of the largest economic regions in the world and now serves as a producer of some of the most important agricultural products in the world, especially rice, palm oil, and coconut (ASEAN,

2014a). Its \$1.2 trillion of merchandise exports and 7% share of global exports also support the distinctive roles of ASEAN in the world market. ASEAN also attracts many investors through its abundance of natural resources, its low-cost workforce, and its strategic location for the Asia-Pacific region. These advantages have led to its large share of global trade, and the investment trend continually increases over time (ASEAN, 2014a). The tourism industry in ASEAN also plays a leading role in the ASEAN economy, which can generate significant income for the region (UNWTO, 2017). Due to such economic potential and unique cooperation, ASEAN has developed to become an interesting and powerful region at present.

1.3 ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (ASEAN MRA) and ASEAN MRA on Tourism Professionals (ASEAN MRA-TP)

Through the Bangkok Declaration, economic cooperation and its activities have been recognised as the key driving force for ASEAN integration. The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), signed in 1992, is one of the pieces of legislation that support the intentions of ASEAN in strengthening economic integration in the region. It was established to eliminate tariff barriers between ASEAN member countries to increase the competitiveness of ASEAN as a production base and to attract more investment (ASEAN, 1999). After AFTA, promoting economic cooperation in the region was developed by establishing AEC. In pursuit of AEC, the free flow of goods, services, investment, and of capital and skilled labour, have been used as the crucial mechanisms for achieving the aim of becoming a single market and a production base.

In terms of the services sector, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) was signed in 1995. Its goal was to liberalise trade in services by eliminating trade barriers and to enhance cooperation in services between member states to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of the service sector (ASEAN, 2014b). AFAS operates on the basis of the principle of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) established by the World Trade Organization (WTO). It classifies four modes of supply:

- Mode 1: Cross-border trade

- Mode 2: Consumption abroad
- Mode 3: Commercial presence
- Mode 4: Presence of natural persons.

These four modes are for both the trade and service sectors, which are ready to be liberalised. After signing this agreement, the member states had many meetings and negotiations to put the free movement of services into practice, especially for the free movement of natural persons. With the condition that the domestic laws of member states restrict and protect some occupations for their people, ASEAN needed to consider harmonisation and standardisation of skilled labour to facilitate the free movement of skilled labour in the region (Vipamaneerut and Duncan, 2012). For this reason, the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) framework was developed under mode 4 of AFAS to support the movement of skilled labour and professionals.

The ASEAN MRA is an agreement among ASEAN member countries to facilitate free movement of skilled labour and to enhance cooperation on mutual recognition of qualifications. It also serves as a policy instrument, one of the significant supporting factors in achieving the goal of economic integration and ensuring the growth and sustainability of the ASEAN economies. From 2005 to 2012, ASEAN had agreed to freer movement of skilled labour in eight professional areas, namely engineering, nursing, architecture, surveying, medical practice, dental practice, accountancy, and tourism. The general approach of the ASEAN MRA is for citizens to be able to work across ASEAN countries without any restrictions. Each skilled labourer has to meet the requirements of the host country before being licensed as a skilled professional, including appropriate educational qualifications, minimum years of work experience, professional registration or licence, etc. Moreover, qualified skilled labourers have to follow the domestic laws and regulations of the host country along with the rules of professional conduct. Although most of the ASEAN MRAs use a similar pattern for implementation concerned with regulated professionals, the ASEAN MRA on Tourism Professionals shows a distinctive difference, in that it deals with unregulated jobs and focuses on competency standards.

The ASEAN member states signed the ASEAN MRA-TP in 2012 to facilitate the mobility of tourism professionals within ASEAN countries and to improve the quality of the services they delivered (ASEAN, 2013a). It also serves as an essential driving

force in raising standards of tourism and improving the qualifications of the tourism workforce in the ASEAN region. This agreement covers 32 tourism-professional job titles in six labour divisions, ranging from housekeeping, front office, food and beverage services, and food production for hotel services, to travel agencies and tour operation for travel services (see Table 1). Since the jobs under this agreement do not require any regulations, this MRA can be applied to most workers in the labour market, and its process and implementation are different from those of other MRAs. However, the eligibility to work in ASEAN member countries is only approved when tourism professionals have a tourism competency certificate in specific tourism job titles, and they are also subjected to the domestic laws and regulations of each country.

HOTEL SERVICES				TRAVEL SERVICES	
Front Office	House Keeping	Food Production	Food & Beverage	Travel Agencies	Tour Operation
Front Office Manager	Executive Housekeeper	Executive Chef	F&B Director	General Manager	Product Manager
Front Office Supervisor	Laundry Manager	Demi Chef	F&B Outlet Manager	Assistant GM	Sales & Mkt Manager
Receptionist	Floor Supervisor	Commis Chef	Head Waiter	Senior Travel Consultant	Credit Manager
Telephone Operator	Laundry Attendant	Chef de Partie	Bartender	Travel Consultant	Ticketing Manager
Bell Boy	Room Attendant	Commis Pastry	Waiter		Tour Manager
	Public Area Cleaner	Baker			
		Butcher			

Table 1: Job Titles and Six Common Labour Divisions of ASEAN MRA-TP

It is necessary to identify common competency standards for each tourism job title in order to achieve the mobility of tourism professionals in the ASEAN region, and also to establish a board and committee to control, access, approve, and register qualified tourism professionals. Therefore, the infrastructure of the ASEAN MRA-TP has been established both at national and regional levels. The key components of the ASEAN MRA-TP comprise the ASEAN Tourism Professional Monitoring Committee (ATPMC), the National Tourism Professional Board (NTPB), the Tourism Professional

Certification Board (TPCB), the Common ASEAN Tourism Curriculum (CATC), the ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals (ACCSTP), the ASEAN Tourism Professionals Registration System (ATPRS), and the ASEAN Tourism Qualifications Equivalency Matrix (ATQEM).

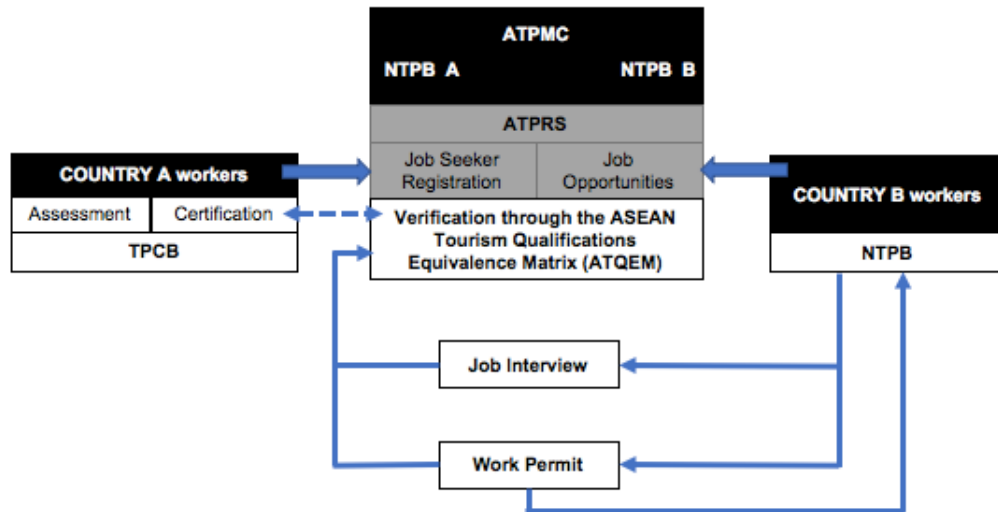


Figure 1: The Key Elements of ASEAN MRA-TP

At the regional level, ATPMC is established as the monitoring body. It consists of the representatives of ASEAN National Tourism Organisation (NTOs) and NTPBs of each member country. Its main responsibility is to oversee the performance of the ASEAN MRA-TP mechanism (ACCSTP) and to monitor the operation of TPCBs. ATPMC works closely with TPCBs in facilitating the exchange of information on the ASEAN MRA-TP as well as to resolve disputes between member states to support the smooth implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Each member state is required to establish two agencies at the national level: NTPB and TPCB. NTPB creates awareness and disseminates the information within the country as well as monitoring ACCSTP. TPCB is an agency supporting the in-country qualification endorsement. Its functions are to assess the qualification and competency of tourism professionals and to issue certification for qualified workers so that they can register with ATPRS. The above explanation of the ASEAN MRA-TP process is shown in Figure 1.

In the area of competency and qualification, The ASEAN MRA-TP highlights common competency standards and a common curriculum to support labour mobility. ACCSTP was developed as a set of minimum competency standards for workers from ASEAN

countries to work in hotel and travel services. ACCSTP is based on the concepts of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes (competence) that are required of tourism professionals for each job title. It is also designed to equate comparable qualifications across ASEAN countries. The competencies under the ACCSTP framework are the minimum standards required by the industry and employers for qualified workers to be able to work in the ASEAN countries. The competencies are classified into three groups of skills: core, generic, and functional. Core competencies are common for workers who are accepted to work in a particular primary division of labour. Generic competencies are specified for workers at a particular secondary division of labour. Lastly, functional competencies are related to the specific skills and knowledge required for each job.

Based on ACCSTP, the CATC, approved by ASEAN Tourism Ministers, has been developed in the form of Competency Based Training (CBT). The framework of CATC is designed to be industry-based, flexible, and well-structured to support the requirements of ASEAN member states. CATC covers the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for training tourism professionals.

It is classified into five qualification levels in each of the six labour divisions to support the requirements of ASEAN member countries and the needs of the industry. In order to use CATC toolboxes, master trainers and master assessors at the regional level are trained, followed by trainers and assessors at the national level. Trainers and assessors at the national level are then responsible for training candidates in tourism services and ensuring they acquire the required skills and knowledge.

As explained previously, the challenge of the ASEAN MRA-TP is related to the fact that non-regulated occupations are part of the tourism industry, and there are no agreed standards for conformity assessment. Therefore, the equivalent matrix of tourism qualifications in the ASEAN tourism industry is important. ATPRS and ATQEM have been constructed as the central registration system for tourism professionals in ASEAN. ATQEM is an electronic cross-referencing matrix designed to weigh the qualifications in relevant fields of tourism. It was developed using the CATC qualification to serve as the assessment of conformity with the ASEAN MRA-TP. ATQEM works alongside ATPRS in providing an electrical and automatic interpretation of the status of tourism qualifications. The comparative weighing of

qualifications of tourism professionals is expressed as an index number or a band on a scale to inform the qualification level. In the meantime, the web-based facility ATPRS serves as the registration system for recognising tourism qualifications. Workers who are interested in working in the tourism and hotel industry are required to submit their qualifications to TPCB in their home country through ATPRS. ATPRS is designed to perform two parallel functions: compiling the records of tourism professionals, and serving as the database system for licensed employers and agencies. It will be a well-defined reference mechanism, linked to the standards of ACCSTP Framework (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015). These applicants' qualifications will be evaluated through ATQEM. A similar qualification awarded by similar accreditation structures in ASEAN member countries can give the equivalent value.

Heads of ASEAN member countries expected that the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP would create an impact on ASEAN member countries as well as benefitting stakeholders, governments, education and training providers, and tourism professionals in the tourism industry (ASEAN, 2013a). Not only could it promote the mobility of tourism professionals, but the ASEAN MRA-TP can also enhance the sharing of good practice and information between member countries, leading to an increase in national and regional competitiveness. The common competency standard and common tourism curriculum are considered as an important factor for Thai universities in developing their curriculum to meet these standards and competencies. In terms of the labour market and industry, qualified tourism professionals have more chances to relocate to other ASEAN countries for work and gain more multicultural experiences. On the other hand, employers in the tourism industry can find potential candidates who meet their needs and standards. Finally, the ASEAN MRA-TP can improve the overall quality of tourism services in ASEAN, which is beneficial for regional economic growth and development.

1.4 Thai Higher Education and ASEAN

Having considered ASEAN and its activities, Thai higher education is one of the sectors that needs to prepare itself to support these challenges. The traditional duty of the Thai higher education sector in servicing local needs must change. Addressing regional needs has become a new task for both Thai HEIs and the Thai government.

Their role is not only to cultivate students' employability but also to prepare them to cope with the upcoming challenges in this changing world.

Human resources are the key factor for regional development. The importance of education in ASEAN integration was mentioned in the ASEAN Charter, the constitution for the ASEAN community (ASEAN, 2008). In Article 1, paragraph 10 of the ASEAN Charter, the proclaimed role of education is 'to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community'. This mandate was reaffirmed by the 'Cha-Am Hua Hin Declaration on Strengthening Cooperation on Education to Achieve an ASEAN Caring and Sharing Community' (ASEAN, 2009). This declaration puts more emphasis on the importance of education in regional integration and addresses its role in the three main pillars of ASEAN. From the point of view of ASEAN, the education sector plays a vital role in establishing the ASEAN community through building awareness of ASEAN and sharing a collective identity. Education is also expected to increase the competitiveness of the member states and the region through the development of human resources. Improving educational and professional standards has been stated as the role of education in this declaration in order to support the mobility of skilled workers in ASEAN.

Moreover, ASEAN developed the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan on Education (2011–2015) to promote cooperation in the education sector. This plan covers activities across the whole system, from basic education to life-long learning, by focusing on four strategic priorities: ASEAN awareness, access to quality education, cross-border mobility and internationalisation of education, and support for other ASEAN sectoral bodies with interest in education (ASEAN, 2012). In the field of higher education, promoting the internationalisation of higher education in ASEAN member states, student mobility, and quality assurance are stated as the main goals. The role of higher education is mentioned again in the second ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan on Education (2016–2020) in relation to strengthening the university-industry partnership and harmonising the mobility activities.

In addition to the big picture of cooperation in education, the plan for higher education cooperation became notable when the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher

Education was adopted (ASEAN, 2015). Under the declaration, the role of higher education is strengthened as the catalyst for accelerating the development of ASEAN. Enhancing cooperation in higher education between ASEAN member states through mobility and increasing the visibility of ASEAN higher education are suggested for the sustainable development of ASEAN.

Higher education at the regional level serves as the primary producer of human resources. As products of higher education, graduates are expected to be the key mechanism to achieve the goals of ASEAN: build unity, prosperity, and regional awareness. The role of higher education at the national level serves to achieve these same goals when skilled workers are the key to a country's development. The first role of Thai higher education was to support the modernisation of the country. Subsequently, the need for skilled labour in order for the nation to compete in the globalised world strengthened the leading role of higher education and urged students' preparation.

The Thai higher education sector considered the impact of a borderless world and prepared itself to cope with this challenge by internationalising higher education. The idea of internationalisation has been a top priority in Thai HEIs' plans for more than 20 years, and its significance increased when ASEAN was integrated. The development of internationalisation in Thai HEIs is explained in Chapter 2. In addition to the policy on internationalisation, the OHEC produces the strategic documents that consider the impact of ASEAN on Thai higher education. The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education and The Strategies of Thai Higher Education for the Preparation for the ASEAN Community in 2015 have been developed in order to guide Thai HEIs.

The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008–2022) was launched as a roadmap in order to promote the future direction of the Thai higher education sector, with the aim of improving the system's quality. It also describes seven main scenarios impacting Thai society and the Thai higher education system: demography, energy, environment, labour market trends, violence and conflict management decentralisation, the role of students in the post-industrialised world, and the philosophy of a sufficient economy. The main factors that have considerable impacts on higher education management include ASEAN integration, the liberalisation of trade in education services, and the free flow of labour. With respect

to ASEAN integration, Thai HEIs have prepared and adjusted their curricula by adding more information on ASEAN in order to build awareness. Moreover, learning ASEAN languages and English, the common language of ASEAN, has been emphasised by the Thai government.

The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008-2022) considered the aforementioned scenarios and external factors relating to the higher education system and suggested issues of concern. Articulation of basic and vocational education, reform of the existing higher education system through university governance and administration, support for the links between universities and the private sector and research development, the proliferation of higher education, the strengthening of university networks, and infrastructure improvements were identified as the targeted framework for higher education development.

To support the establishment of the ASEAN community and its activities, the OHEC also launched The Strategies of Thai Higher Education for the Preparation for the ASEAN Community in 2015 alongside the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan. These strategies focus on the importance of the liberalisation of trade in education services and the future trends of labour markets, which are also mentioned in the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan. When the liberalisation policy is fully implemented, both electronic and traditional education will be free for providing across the region. Moreover, the future labour market will require workers to have both professional and intercultural skills as well as English language proficiency. Therefore, the OHEC intends to increase the mobility of students and educational programmes in the region in order to support the expected outcome of this plan, which is to produce Thai graduates who meet international standards and have more awareness as members of the ASEAN community, along with developing cooperation between ASEAN member countries in higher education management.

These strategies also stress the importance of Thai graduate competencies, strengthening Thai HEIs in terms of curricula and faculty, and the role of Thai higher education in ASEAN. Hence, Thai HEIs, together with the OHEC, are expected to recognise their significant role in developing professional, intercultural, and language skills so that Thai graduates are able to compete with other workers in the regional labour market. Moreover, enhancing the quality of curricula and faculty is also required. For the OHEC, working closely with other regional agencies, such as the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centres for Higher

Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN), on the harmonisation of the ASEAN higher education system is crucial.

Regarding the ASEAN MRA-TP, the Thai higher education sector played a significant role in encouraging the signing of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. With the hesitation regarding the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai society, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, as the agency primarily responsible, decided to delay signing the agreement and asked the related Thai agencies to brainstorm both the advantages and disadvantages of this agreement. As the main producer of skilled labour, the higher education sector was asked to participate in the meeting to give comments and suggestions regarding this agreement.

Higher education is important for the development of the Thai nation. It serves as the foundation for sustainable growth and development. Especially in the period of ASEAN integration, higher education plays a more significant role in the economic growth and competitiveness of the country. The impact of ASEAN integration and its free-flow activities affects Thai HEIs in terms of role and operations. The context and role of Thai HEIs are crucial to this research, which intends to analyse the response of representatives of Thai HEIs towards the impact of ASEAN.

1.5 Research objective and Questions

The main objective of this research is to understand the views and perspective of Thai HEIs regarding the ASEAN MRA-TP and the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The academic activities, policies, and strategies, as well as the changes seen in Thai HEIs as a result of supporting the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP, are studied.

With reference to the difference in Thai university governance, it is interesting to investigate how Thai HEIs under different types of governance have interpreted and applied government policy in relation to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The similarities and dissimilarities between their operational reactions towards ASEAN MRA-TP are also analysed.

Therefore, the main research question of this study addresses: How Thai HEIs change in responding to ASEAN MRA-TP?. In order to answer the main research question, three subordinate questions are identified. As this research is focused on

the operational responses of Thai HEIs towards ASEAN MRA-TP, the impact factors, both external and internal, are observed in order to understand the response of Thai HEIs. The first subordinate question is: 'What factors affect the operation of Thai HEIs in response to ASEAN MRA-TP?'. The second question is related to the roles of the government. The ASEAN MRA-TP is an agreement at the regional level, which requires effective implementation from the government sector. Identifying the roles and strategies of government for the work of Thai HEIs in terms of this context is necessary to understand the direction of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The question then arises: what is the role of government in the context of Thai HEIs responding to ASEAN MRA-TP?'. The last question was developed due to a slight difference identified in the methods of governance of Thai HEIs: 'What variations, if any, have HEIs with different types of governance experienced in their response to the ASEAN MRA-TP?'. The differences in budget support and the rules and regulations used by Thai HEIs are interesting factors, which might relate to the operational response of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP.

1.6 Research design

With the intention to understand the behaviour and operations that have taken place within Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP, in-depth investigation through qualitative research is required. Case study-based research was chosen to gather the research data as it can provide detailed information on the changes in Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Three universities were selected as case studies in this research. Each university represents a different type of university governance: an autonomous university, a public university, and a private university. These three universities show distinction in the tourism and hospitality sectors, as they have the highest student enrolment figures in these areas when compared to other universities under similar governance. Moreover, these universities have also worked closely with MOTS in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand.

In-depth interviews and documentation research were applied for data collection. In order to access the interviewees, an official letter was sent to the heads of the universities to ask for permission to conduct the research and interview the staff. The list of interview questions, together with the letter of consent, was sent directly to all

interviewees before the interview sessions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide the opportunity for the interviewee to add interesting information related to the research. An audio recording was used in all the interview sessions after obtaining prior permission. The interview sessions lasted between an hour and over two hours, depending on the discussion and the available time of the interviewees. All interviews were transcribed and sent to the interviewees to recheck the accuracy of the interview data.

Thematic analysis was applied for data analysis. The NVivo programme also served as a useful instrument for data management. All interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo to identify core ideas and themes. After the programme identified the themes, a manual analysis was applied both to the interview data and the related documents for making sense and preparing a hypothesis based on the research data.

1.7 Contribution of research

Many scholars have centred their attention on the research of ASEAN and higher education (Koh, 2007; Robertson, 2008a; Knight, 2012a; Thanalerdsopit, et al., 2014). The main focus of such research is the overall picture of ASEAN and its impact on the higher education context, not mentioning ASEAN activities, or the key factor of higher education, i.e. universities. Considering only the research related to the ASEAN MRA in Thai contexts, much of the research examines how professionals or graduates cope with the impact of other areas of ASEAN MRAs such as accounting or engineering (Suttipan, 2012; Jongtrakul, 2013; Gamez and Borabo, 2014). The preparation of graduates and workers towards ASEAN MRAs is the main focus of much research – the role and operations of higher education institutions as the key mechanism in the higher education sector are not expressed as the primary target. Moreover, very little research has focused on the way in which Thai HEIs have responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, the present research intends to individually examine the responses of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. This study also seeks to fill the research gap by exploring the isomorphism pressures that have impacted Thai HEIs while working on various activities in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The reflexive picture on the work of the government sector and the live policies and strategies in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP are expressed, since this research

focuses on the reactions and perceptions of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. This information can be used as an assessment of the success of the work of the government on ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand. Moreover, it can serve as a policy recommendation for related government agencies when they prepare to formulate new policies and strategies to support the upcoming regional activities.

1.8 Outline of this research

The thesis is organised into seven main chapters, including this introduction.

Chapter 2 introduces the organisational basis of higher education in Thailand and its organisational evolution in tandem with policy innovation. The administrative and organisational structure of Thai higher education sector is explained. The key characteristics of each type of Thai HEIs are also identified, which is essential for understanding the way Thai HEIs responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Chapter 3 reviews and discusses the theoretical framework and other related theories. The first part explores regionalism theories, both classic and new regionalism, in order to understand the importance of ASEAN integration and its economic activities. Moreover, theories on international relations; realism, neo-liberalism and constructivism, are also used as an additional approach to explaining the ASEAN integration and its characteristics. These ideas reflect the ASEAN formation and related policies that affect the operation of Thai HEIs. The regionalisation in higher education and the internationalisation in higher education are also discussed. The last part focuses on the theoretical framework of this research, which is an institutional isomorphism.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology applied in this study. The research background and problems are reviewed to re-emphasise the importance of this research. The research design and method are explained through case-based qualitative research, alongside presenting information on the case study selection and the interview process. The process of data analysis through a thematic analysis approach is explained in the data analysis section. Validity and reliability, ethical considerations and the limitations of the research are also discussed.

Chapter 5 discusses the research results obtained from each case study: universities A, B, and C. It begins with the core themes of the research results as they are helpful

for the reader to understand the overall picture of the research data. The key characteristics of each case study are then displayed for a better understanding of the research context. The result of each case study is then reported under each core theme.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the research data, along with discussing the cross-case analysis of the findings originating from each case study. This is followed by the explanation of the research data from the perspective of the existing literature. The theory of institutional isomorphism is explained in the Thai higher education context.

Chapter 7 summarises an overview of the thesis. Each research question is answered with an explanation. The findings of the research are linked back to the theoretical background. The contribution and the implications of the research, as well as further research suggestions, are then provided.

1.9 Chapter summary

ASEAN integration and its activities serve as an interesting phenomenon, having a significant impact on all the member states, including Thailand. The free movement of goods and services, as well as skilled labour, has had a significant impact on many sectors within the member states, including the education sector. As Thailand is one of the main tourist destinations in ASEAN, the movement of tourism professionals under the ASEAN MRA-TP can serve as the advantage and disadvantage for the higher education sector, since it is the main agency of workforce production to support the needs of the market. The stiff competition in the labour market of the tourism industry requires more attention and preparation. This research aims to understand how Thai HEIs have responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP. In order to achieve this aim, the impact factors, the roles of the government, and operational responses of the Thai HEIs under different types of governance are also identified. Three samples of Thai HEIs are selected to provide in-depth information related to their operations for supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP.

This chapter has provided the background information for the study in order to give a clear picture of the significance and importance of this research. The next chapter presents the existing literature related to this research, which explores the formation of ASEAN from the perspective of new regionalism and international relations theories

(realism, neo-liberalism and constructivism). The internationalisation of higher education and higher education regionalisation are also discussed, followed by an explanation of the theoretical framework of institutional isomorphism.

Chapter 2

Education in Thailand

This chapter introduces the organisational basis of higher education in Thailand. Key higher education actors, agencies and stakeholders, are introduced and an account is provided of the higher education policy context. The development of Thai higher education and education reform is discussed in the second part of the chapter, which also illuminates the role played by higher education providers in Thai society and the influence of policy innovations on them. The last part of the chapter introduces the nature and characteristics of each type of Thai HEIs, which are important for understanding the way they responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

2.1 Education in Thailand

Every step and movement of ASEAN integration directly affects the respective member states in all sectors, especially the education sector, as it recognises the foundation of economic growth and social development (Rupavijetra, 2011). Education is considered as the key mechanism for the smooth integration of ASEAN and the enhancement of ASEAN competitiveness. The present study focuses on the higher education sector, especially as HEIs are a leading factor in facing challenges in terms of economic activities under the ASEAN framework. Over the last few decades, the Thai higher education context has continuously developed, reflecting the management and operations of Thai HEIs. It is necessary to provide their context and background in order to have a clear picture of Thai higher education and to understand their operations concerning the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Thailand has a long history of education, since the thirteenth century, with the development of Thai alphabets and temple schools first emerging (Fry and Bi, 2013). Thai society in that period focused only on the simple Thai way of life and was free from foreign ideology. Buddhist temples were the centre of society, including their role in providing education. Monks acted as teachers in many subjects such as Bali grammar, fine arts, law, medicine, and astronomy (Fry and Bi, 2013). However, education in this period was provided only for male elites, while women focused on housework skills. Hence, the monasteries and monks had a strong influence in the traditional system of education from that period until the reign of King Rama V (1868

– 1910), the beginning of the modernisation period of Siam (the historical name for Thailand).

During his reign, King Rama V intended to protect the sovereignty of the country from Western expansionism through a transformation from a traditional into a modernising society (Fry and Bi, 2013; Pimpa, 2011). The need for educated people for national development had increased, which led to the modernisation of the Thai education system for general public access (Cleesuntorn, 2016). With a strong influence from the British system, Thai education has continually developed alongside the growth of the country's economy (Vorapanya and Dunlap, 2014). According to the 1992 National Scheme of Education, the 6-3-3 education model is applied in the Thai education system: (three years of pre-primary schooling); six years of primary schooling; three years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary schooling. Compulsory education in Thailand is nine years of basic education, i.e. primary and lower secondary. After that, pupils can choose between pursuing the upper secondary level in general education to prepare for university or to continue with vocational education. At the university level, a bachelor's degree course lasts four to six years, depending on the degree type (see Figure 2).

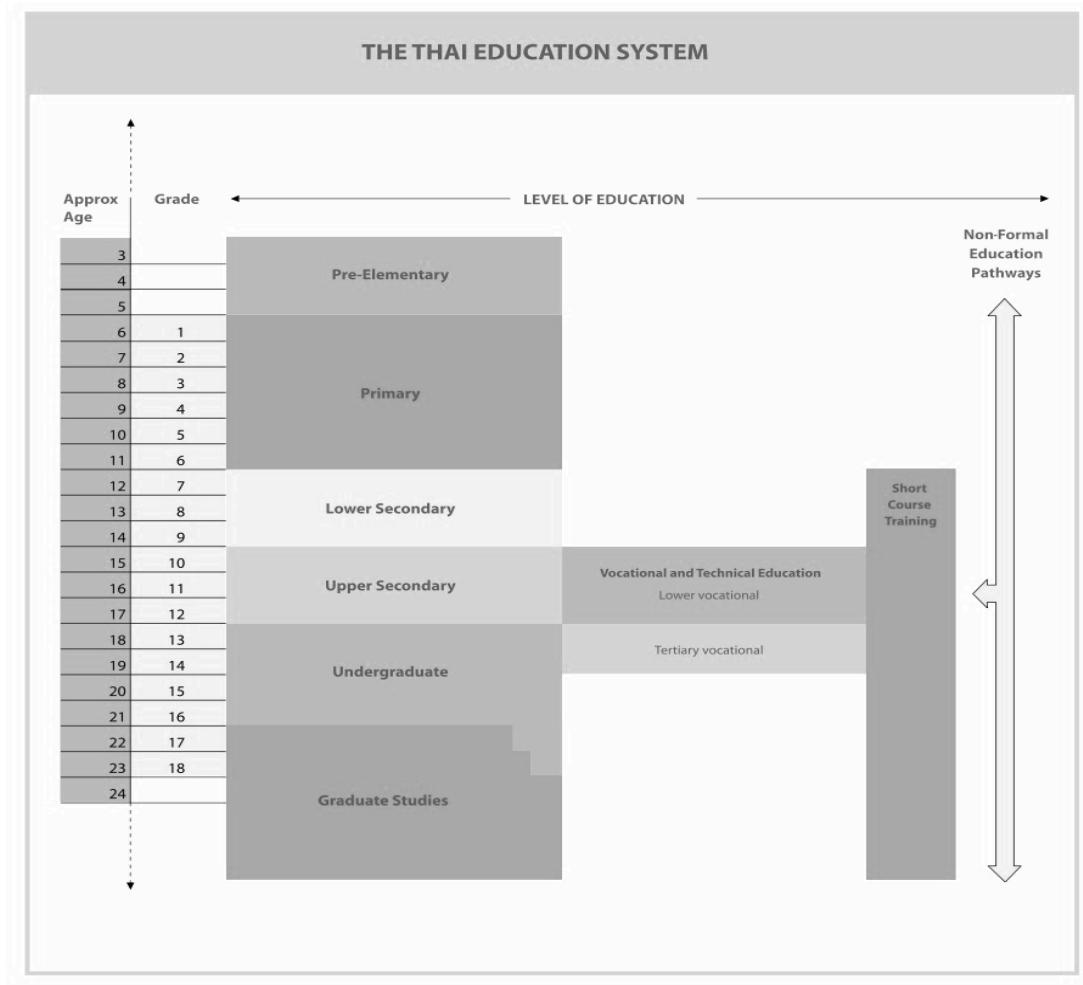


Figure 2: Thai Education system

(Source: Ministry of Education, 2007)

The policy and management of Thai education are under the oversight of the Ministry of Education (MOE), which governs all the education levels. Four main organisations under the MOE administer different sectors of the education system. The Office of the Education Council (OEC) is in charge of formulating the national education plan. Basic education provision, both primary and secondary, is under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC). The main responsibility for vocational education belongs to the Office of the Vocational Education Commission (OVEC), while university administration is under the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC). The organisational structure of MOE is shown in Figure 3.

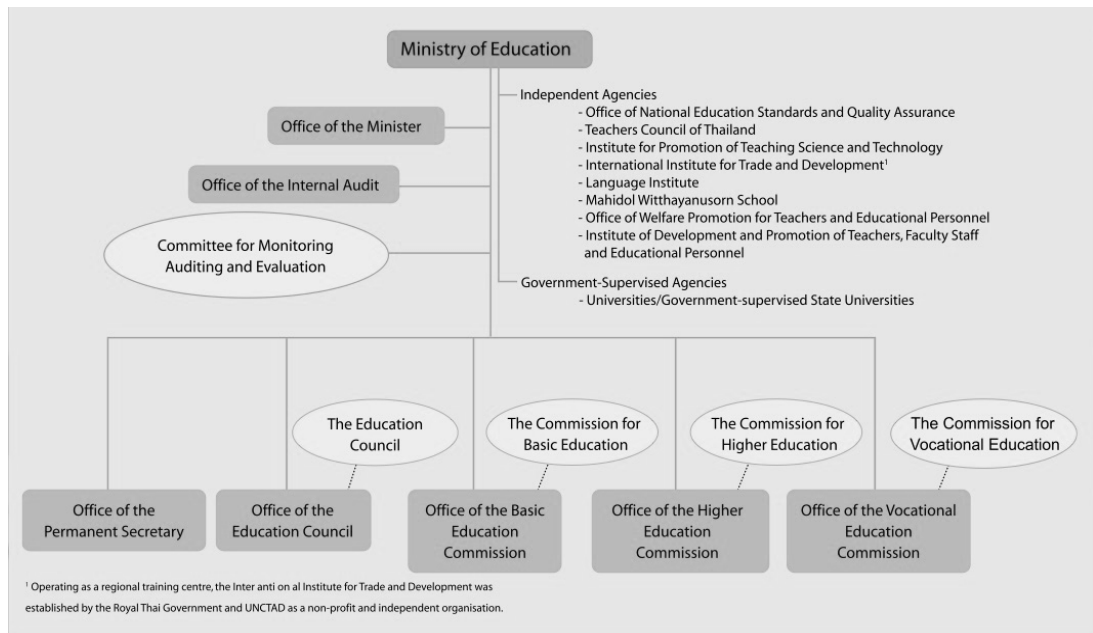


Figure 3: Organisation of administration in Education Service Areas

(Sources: Education in Thailand 2007, The Office of the Education Council (2007))

2.2 Development of Thai higher education

As mentioned, during the reign of King Rama V, the importance of human resources development as a supportive force for national development and prosperity was addressed. The education reform during his reign focused more on higher education. At that time, 'Thailand may have been influenced by higher education philosophies and systems from a western perspective' (Pimpa 2011, p.274). French and British values had strong influences on the ways chose to create and structure Thai higher education. The first Thai university, Chulalongkorn University, was established in 1917 with the intention to harmonise between being traditionally Thai and modern knowledge (Sangnapabaworn, 2003). This establishment aimed to train the elite members of Thai society to serve the needs of modernised bureaucracy and infrastructure. This university applied the French concept of *Grandes Écoles* (The great school) through the integration of four existing educational institutions – medical school, teacher training school, law school and the school of the royal page – into one. This establishment of the first university in Thailand showed not only the influence of Western models but also evidence for the strong influence of bureaucratic norms and attitudes in Thai higher education.

Apart from the influence from European countries, American influence was also felt in Thailand, including in the Thai higher education sector. America became more important in Thailand after the end of the World War II when Thailand was a strategic partner in preventing the expansion of communism in the SEA region. According to Lao (2015), the relationship between America and Thai higher education occurred in various forms: economic assistance; development grants and technical cooperation; American values, and the higher education structure. With America's strong economic and political influence in Thailand, it was inevitable for Thai higher education to follow the American model. The expansion of Thai universities into regional areas was influenced by an American concept (Sinlarat, 2005). Different from universities in the early period, the newly established universities also followed the American approach by being comprehensive universities. They were not related to any particular ministries, and they provided multiple faculties, with a range of programmes of study.

At present, the role of higher education in the era of globalisation has been enlarged in order to support the demands of the government and the economy. Due to the massification of higher education, the number of Thai HEIs has grown significantly, as witnessed by the rising number of enrolments in Thai HEIs between 1999 (1,814,096) and 2014 (2,405,109) (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2018). However, a decline in student enrolment in the past few years (1,575,958 in 2018) has led to dramatic changes in Thai HEIs. Some existing colleges in the same or neighbouring provinces have been merged and reorganised as new public universities, while others have been closed down. Currently, there are 156 Thai HEIs in total: 58 public universities (including two open-admission universities), 26 autonomous universities, and 72 private universities and colleges (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2018).

According to Clark, the three main forces for policy trajectory in higher education systems are the state, the market, and the academic community (Clark, 1983; Nilpan, 2005). The changes in the higher education system in Thailand also conform to this conceptualisation. The role of the state in Thai higher education was clearly defined between 1916 and the 1970s (Nilpan, 2005; Lao, 2015). A significant shift of power has been explicitly seen since the 1980s when the market forces became more significant in Thai higher education. There have been several changes in the administration of the Thai higher education system. During the early stages,

universities were subjected to the control of the MOE, under the university department. The rector of a university was appointed to manage all internal matters, including financial, academic, human resources, and infrastructure concerns. In 1937, three universities for specialised learning (e.g. agriculture and medicine) were established. These universities were under the governance of the respective ministries, i.e. Kasetsart university was under the Ministry of Agriculture. The role of universities in this period were limited, as was academic freedom. These universities were responsible for producing graduates in their respective areas and focused only on one particular profession each (Maneeroj, 2002). This kind of administration system led to several problems: lack of cohesion and direction in higher education; unequal development of universities, and the role of higher education becoming more that of a professional school, rather than providing higher learning and research by international standards. Later, in 1956, the National University Council was established to be responsible for policy planning, management and budgeting, as well as coordinating with other relevant ministries (Lao, 2015).

In 1959, The Office of National Education Council (ONEC) was established to centralise educational strategies and provide standardised academic policies, and the National University Council was placed under the control of ONEC. ONEC also aimed to reduce the development gap between universities in metropolitan and rural areas. However, Thailand was in a period of rigid military dictatorship, and the prime minister's office played a vital role in overseeing national planning, including for higher education (Chaloemtiarana, 2007). As Lao states, 'Higher education management during this period lacked institutional autonomy' (2015, p.46). The issue with higher education administration falling under the prime minister's office was the delay in the decision-making process. The government recognised this problem and tried to seek an appropriate structure while retaining the relationship between state and higher education. The idea for returning the higher education sector to the governance of the Ministry of Education had been raised; however, it was argued by the Council of University President Thailand (CUPT). The Ministry of State University Affairs was then established in 1972 to oversee the universities owned by the state and later, in 1977, was upgraded to be the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA), an independent ministry with its own minister, which included the provision of private universities. According to Lao (2015), the creation of the MUA reflected the

understanding of the state towards the higher education sector. The MUA was established at a smaller size compared with other ministries as its role was more focused on cooperation than control. It had a high level of flexibility, even under the prime minister's office, and enabled each higher education institutions to develop greater autonomy than the previous management system (Lao 2015, p.47).

The latest change in Thai higher education administration was provoked by the promulgation of the National Education Act (NEA) in 1999. The significant change affecting the higher education sector was the restructuring of the MUA. According to the NEA, all policymaking on education had to come under the oversight of the MOE in order to ensure the unity and coordination of Thai educational policy. The MUA was then consolidated and became one of the five main organisations of the MOE, namely the OHEC. The OHEC, governed by the Higher Education Commission, is now responsible for Thailand's higher education. The key responsibilities of the OHEC are to administer the public universities and to oversee the autonomous and private universities, as well as to formulate policy recommendations in higher education in order to support the National Economic and Social Development Plan and the National Education Plan. Its duties also cover the allocation of funding and resources.

2.3 Types of Thai HEIs

At present, three different types of Thai HEIs have been classified: autonomous universities, public universities, and private higher education institutions. As shown in Table 2, autonomous universities operate under their own authority, acting as a government unit. The universities under this type of governance are encouraged to manage their affairs by themselves, under the supervision of the university council. They also have full authority in terms of academic, financial and personnel administration through the approval of their university council. This type of university receives support from the government in the form of block-grant budgeting (a large amount of budget that can manage itself through general provision). University staff work in these universities on a contractual basis. Public universities, although independent in academic administration and performing as a government unit under their own act, still have to follow government rules and regulations in terms of financial and personnel administration. Funding from the government is seen in the form of project budgeting. The status of staff in this kind of university can also include

civil servants. Meanwhile, private higher education institutions operate under the Private Higher Education Institution Act with freedom in academic, financial and personnel administration. The government supervises only the quality and standards of academic services. Total funding of these institutions come from their own revenues. However, each Thai university is run by its own university council, which is responsible for policy formulation and monitoring the work of the university.

Type of Universities	Autonomy/Regulations			OHEC Role			
	Academic admin.	Personnel admin.	Financial Admin.	Policy	HE standards	Financial support	Monitoring & Evaluation
Autonomous Universities	Autonomy	Autonomy	Autonomy	P	P	P	P
Public Universities	Autonomy	Partial autonomy	Gov. regulated	P	P	P	P
Private HEIs	Autonomy	Autonomy	Autonomy	P	P	O	P

Table 2: The relationship between university autonomy and government role

(Sources: Office of Higher Education Commission (2008))

The Thai government has made more of an effort to encourage Thai HEIs to shift from being entirely civil service organisations to autonomous, quasi- public universities. The idea of changing the university was explicitly developed in the First 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (1990-2004), followed by the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999) in order to support the changes in the economic, political, and educational landscapes (Office of the National Education Commission, 2017). The Thai government expected that government supervision of Thai HEIs would improve their efficiency. This shift in the administrative structure required significant management changes to Thai HEIs. When the university is not under bureaucratic control and is more concerned with securing financial operations and domestic and international competition, the autonomous university might perform differently to ensure its survival. Autonomous universities might develop different

activities in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP compared to those developed by other types of universities (public and private universities).

Nevertheless, Thai HEIs have been categorised into four groups based on the Second 15-year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008-2022) (See Table 3):

- Research/Postgraduate University
- Science and Technology/Specialised/Comprehensive University
- Liberal Arts University
- Community College

The purpose of these groupings is to improve the quality of higher education based on the missions and goals of the universities in each group, which are clearly defined. OHEC expects that this classification system can lead to harmonious growth that will support national economic growth and social development needs (OHEC, 2008). This kind of classification is also useful in the context of sampling. When the priority areas of universities are different based on the universities' grouping, the direction and operation of each sampled university in response to some specific area might be different.

With the fact that all Thai HEIs have freedom in academic administration, reinforcing the quality assurance system by setting guidelines for all public and private higher education institutions is a vital role of the OHEC. Moreover, it also acts as a link between the Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), which takes responsibility for external quality assurance, and Thai HEIs to ensure mutual understanding and further actions after external assessments are completed.

	Higher Education Institutions			
	Community College	Liberal Arts University	Specialised/ Comprehensive University	Research/Graduate University
Degree granted	A.S/AA	B.A/M.A	B.A/M.A/Ph.D	B.A/M.A/Ph.D/ Post Doc.
Proportion of Ph.D academic staff	10%	50%	70%	100%
Propotion of science:social science students	20:80	40:60	60:40	90:10
Link to national development needs	Strengthen community and promote sustainable development	Develop local administration organisation and regional business	Manufacturing sector	Competitive industry
Characteristics of Graduates	Manpower in location production sector	Manpower for driving local change	Knowledge/high productivity workers	Global leaders/opinion makers
Service areas	Province/district	Province/region	Metropolitan big cities	Metropolitan small cities

Table 3: Categories of Higher Education Institutions under the Long-Term Plan

(Source: World Bank Group (2008))

The management of Thai HEIs has become more flexible, and the government has changed its role to become more of a facilitator. Bureaucrats still only play a role in policy formation and quality assurance at the national level; the direction and operations of Thai HEIs are based on their decisions. Therefore, studying the background and the changes in Thai higher education can lead to the development of an understanding of the changes in Thai HEIs' behaviours when they are faced with any new challenges, e.g. the ASEAN MRA-TP.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter focuses on providing information on the Thai education system and Thai higher education. The development of Thai higher education reflects the changes in the role of Thai education in order to respond to the changes in Thai economics and society. Thai higher education as a tool for country competitiveness is also developed. The information on the key characteristics of each type of Thai HEI provided in this chapter is necessary for analysing their views and responses toward the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The next chapter presents the existing literature related to this research, which explores the formation of ASEAN from the perspective of new regionalism and international relations theories (realism, neo-liberalism and constructivism). The internationalisation of higher education and higher education regionalisation are also discussed, followed by an explanation of the theoretical framework of institutional isomorphism.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

This chapter reviews relevant academic literature and presents the theoretical framework used to study the impact of ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai HEIs. This chapter starts by reviewing the research literature on the formation of ASEAN and its effect on the higher education community. Theories of regional integration and international relation theories are then explained in relation to this research. This study follows the internationalisation of universities, the key player in this research, as well as the regionalisation in ASEAN higher education, which affect the operations of Thai HEIs. This information is necessary, as it provides the framework of the international activities of Thai HEIs. The last part of the chapter introduces the theoretical framework of this research and the theory of institutional change and institutional isomorphism. As explained in Chapter 2, Thai HEIs are different in terms of administration and budget allocation. However, the bureaucratic norms embedded in Thai HEIs and the role of Thai HEIs in producing the human resources to meet the needs of market expectation, as internal factors, shape the homogeneity of Thai HEIs in the way they respond to any challenges. Moreover, ASEAN MRA-TP and its implementation, as external factors, are also considered as the sources of isomorphic pressures in Thai HEIs. This institutional isomorphism is then essential to understand the changing behaviour of Thai HEIs under the emergence and impact of ASEAN.

3.1 ASEAN and Regional Integration

The rise of globalisation after the end of the Cold War resulted in an extreme change in the world which led to a new pattern of international relations and a new world order. The concept of sovereignty and nation-state power were less meaningful after the end of the Cold War, and each country sought more cooperation for strengthening their bargaining powers as they considered the importance of political, economic, and social interdependence. During the 20th century, the idea of regional integration emerged as the response to the post-war order and had become the point of interest for many scholars (Haas, 1958; Lindberg, 1963; Lindberg and Scheingold, 1971; Moravcsik, 1991, 1993). Regional integration is the process of joining individual nation-states within a region to make a larger scale of cooperation. The degree of integration

depends upon the willingness and commitment of independent sovereign states to share sovereignty. The purpose of integration is mostly concerned with the political economy where economic interests can lead to the achievement of political and security objectives. Haas (1970) describes regional integration as the process by which nation-states 'voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbours to lose the descriptive attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving the conflict between themselves' (Haas, 1970, p.610). Regional integration, together with a trend toward globalisation, gradually grew in importance and became a worldwide phenomenon. ASEAN, like other organisations, was established and recognised as a response to the globalisation phenomenon.

ASEAN has been discussed through many scholarly works (Acharya, 1997, 2006; Mattli, 1999; Stubbs, 2000, 2009; Nesadurai, 2003, 2006; Fort and Webber, 2006; Hew, 2007; Jones and Smith, 2007; Ravenhill, 2008; Plummer, 2009; Kim, 2011, 2014). As the European integration had a strong influence in developing most integration theories (Kim, 2014), the integration of ASEAN was inevitably analysed through the EU lens, even though they are different in orientation, supranational institutions, and consensus agreement. ASEAN was initially established as the political organisation in the Cold War context in 1967. ASEAN's founding purpose was to ensure the survival of its members by promoting regional stability and limiting competition between them (Narine, 2002, pp.12-13). Later, in the post-Cold War era, the intention of economic integration was clearly stated. ASEAN promoted economic integration while implicitly focusing on security issues (Öjendal, 2001). In order to understand this phenomenon, this study of ASEAN regional integration focuses on two strands of thoughts: classical regionalism and new regionalism.

Regionalism is certainly related to 'region' or geographical limitation. Hettne (2005) states that region is the combination of states which share both familiar and different perspectives, such as ethnicity, race, language, trade patterns, ideology, etc. Apart from the physical proximity, the region can imply nongeographical terms related to the domestic coalition (Solingen, 1998; Mansfield and Solingen, 2010). With different interpretations of the region, it is inevitable to find difficulty in specifying the exact meaning of regionalism. Mansfield and Milner (1999) described regionalism as 'the elusive concept for which many theorists spend their time trying to find its best definition. However, many scholars shared the same idea, as the regionalism involved 'institutional'

process (Marchand, Boas and Shaw, 1999; Pempel, 2005; Katzenstein, 2006; Munakata, 2006). According to Nye (1968), when the international region is 'a limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence', then regionalism may be explained as 'the formation of interstate grouping on the basis of regions' (Nye, 1968 cited by Fawcett 2003, p.11). In the view of Hettne (2005), there are no 'natural' or 'given' regions. The sense of region is varied and changeable. Therefore, the study of regionalism should be adjusted in order to support the development and condition of international world systems.

The first wave of regionalism or classic regionalism was constructed through the analysis of European integration during the Cold War (Mansfield and Milner, 1999). In the view of classic regionalism, integration is considered 'a planned merger of national economies through cooperation among a group of nation-states' (Hettne, 2005, p. 547). Many works in this period were influenced by the Euro-centric views and used the economic framework to explain the integration process. The old regionalism or the shallow integration, influenced by the functionalist and neo-functionalist approach, focused on diminishing the role of nation-states and enlarging the market by lowering trade barriers which can be expanded with the cooperation of other sectors (Palmujoki, 2001). The 'spillover' concept, where integration within one sector tends to spread to other sectors, also flourished at this time as 'it appeared to explain exactly what was happening in Western Europe' (George, 1991 cited by Fawcett, 2003, p.13). According to Balassa (1961), the development of regional integration was related to economic cooperation, which can appear as a linear relationship. It started with free trade and was followed by a customs union, common market, economic union, and finally complete economic integration (Balassa, 1961, p.174). The nation-state with the top-down process was then the main actor driving the cooperation. However, space and time were considered the limitation of this thought. The development of regionalism in this period is unique based on the characteristic of each region (Fawn, 2009). When the world order after the end of the Cold War was changed, the new regionalism was introduced to describe the formation of regional integration (Hettne and Inotai, 1994; Fawcett, 2003).

'The new regionalism is a comprehensive, multifaceted and multidimensional process ... the most important [dimension] being culture, security, economic policies and political regimes' (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998, p.7). It emerged intending to understand regional

cooperation in a variety of dimensions. Multiple disciplines have been applied in the study of new regionalism which can provide insightful ideas on how regional organisations are formed and can also provide an understanding of other dimensions besides economics, such as politics and society. The most important features of the new regionalism are its worldwide reach, extending to more regions with greater external linkages (Mittleman, 2000, p.113, cited by Söderbaum, 2003, p.4). Moreover, it puts more emphasis on non-state actors and is concerned with the study of many forms of regional cooperation, such as state-driven, market-driven, sub-regional and trans-regional (Dent, 2008, p.13). Hurrell (1995) suggests that regionalism is related to the interaction between social motivation, identity awareness, intergovernmental cooperation, and support from government and regional cohesion. Wednt (1999) proposes that interdependence in today's world can create a new form of transnational community and a sense of region which is the result of a political and economic cooperation process that can build distinctive regions. Table 4 describes the difference between old regionalism and new regionalism.

Old Regionalism	New Regionalism
Influenced by the Cold War logic, often imposed from the outside by superpowers	Influenced by post-Cold War logic, developed from within the regions
Introverted and protectionist	Extroverted, linked with globalisation
Specific and narrow objective (mainly trade or security)	Comprehensive and multidimensional objectives (economic, politics, security, culture)
Exclusive in term of membership	Inclusive and open membership
European phenomenon, modelled on the European communities	Worldwide and heterogeneous phenomenon
State-centred and state-dominated especially within intergovernmental regional organisations	Involves states, market and civil society actor in many institutional forms

Table 4: Old Regionalism VS New Regionalism

(Source: Hettne and Söderbaum, 2006, p.183)

In fact, as a political organisation, ASEAN was initially created for security. It has been called a state-led organisation, as member states had a strong influence in formulating ASEAN policy. Activities in that period were more focused on the stability and security of the region than on economic cooperation. After the failure of ASA, and in the midst of the threat of communism, ASEAN was formed by Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines in

1960 to promote cultural and economic cooperation (Turnbull, 1992 p.615). Hence, the main activities in this period were focused on regional security and the development of their own nation-building, without concern for economic development (Kim, 2014, p.377). These characteristics prove that ASEAN's formation in that period fell under the idea of old regionalism. However, the change in ASEAN's context and the main goal of regional cooperation led to the new pattern of regional cooperation. The Regional organisation after the end of the Cold War was more diverse and open than before, and the levels of cooperation between sub-states, states, or organisations, were more complex (Shaw, Grant and Conelissen, 2012).

During the period of the Cold War, ASEAN was more concerned with security issues. After the 1990s, ASEAN regional integration gradually grew and, for other issues which are not concerned with security, non-state actors played a more important role at the regional level (Öjendal, 2001, p.170). ASEAN has shown its own distinctive pattern in forming regional integration without any influence from world superpowers. The obvious step for economic integration in the framework of ASEAN was shown in the signing of AFTA in 1992. This phenomenon explicitly showed the need and importance of economic integration in ASEAN (Palmujoki, 2001, p.181). Apart from the progress on economic integration through AFTA, ASEAN also expanded the cooperation to other nations outside the region. The ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, and South Korea) and ASEAN+6 (China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India) cooperation frameworks are the best examples. Additionally, ASEAN also resulted in a multidimensional regional organisation through three community pillars: political-security community, economic community, and socio-cultural community.

As mentioned above, ASEAN integration falls under the theory of new regionalism, which seems to support all regional organisations established by political and economic intentions (Palmujoki, 2001, p.181). However, it is not sufficient to explain the institutional process of ASEAN, as it did not concern the regional-specific or country-specific contexts (Kim, 2011, p.411). As Hameiri states, 'The study of regionalism is too fragmented and lacks sufficient theoretical and conceptual common ground' (2013, p.316). ASEAN is one of the regional organisations that has unique characteristics, specific regional norms, and culture and identity, which are necessary for understanding the ASEAN integration

process. The three schools of thought, realism, neoliberalism, and constructivism, can be then used to explain and analyse the ASEAN cooperation.

From the realist's perspective, the idea of a balance of power is used to explain the formation of ASEAN. Realists believe that great power is the main concern of states, and their survival is the primary goal. As Baylis and Smith (2005, p.163) suggested, 'the states find themselves in the shadow of anarchy with the result that their security cannot be taken for granted. In such circumstances, it's rational for states to compete for power and security'. Combining this assumption with the situation in the 1960s, ASEAN then claimed its foundation as the equilibrium of both external and internal power, and the nations in SEA regions represented the middle and small power. Their security was then based on balancing the power in global systems and regional power (He, 2006, p. 190). The forming of weak states in Southeast Asia was then the only way to exercise political influence and increase collective bargaining power (Narine, 1998). The establishment of ASEAN was viewed as an act of power (Rüland and Jetschke, 2008). During the period of ASEAN's formation, the growing fear against the spread of communism encouraged the states in SEA to establish this form of cooperation which could be the shield for countering this foreign threat such as the cooperation with the United States, China, and Japan. At the same time, the territorial dispute on the North Borneo, the Konfrontasi policy of Indonesia, and the threatening policy toward the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia spread fear and insecurity to the states in SEA. Even when the Cold War ended, many realist scholars still believed in the theory of the balance of power in ASEAN. Emmers (2001) suggested that ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the forum for security dialogue in Asia, served as evidence of power balancing through the involvement of the United States and guiding China toward ethical behaviour in international cooperation. In China's view, ARF was the forum that presented the multipolarity status in Asia-Pacific, countering the unipolarity of the United States.

Realists believed in the self-interest of state and hegemonic power. In their view, the cooperation of the states had to be made with concern for their own interests (Baylis and Smith, 2005, p.381). They believed that the interstate coalitions would occur when these states agreed to shared interests. In many situations, the competition of national interests harmed the institutional building of ASEAN. This was evident in the case of Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines attempting to remove some products from the Free Trade

Area (FTA) agreement during the ASEAN economic crisis in 1997. Realist scholars proved their belief by pointing out the little achievement in economic cooperation of ASEAN, even though it was the primary goal of this organisation. This was especially true in the failure to control and manage the Asian economic crisis, which leads to the unstable economy of ASEAN and many social issues. Even in the matter of security, ASEAN was not able to cope with the internal conflict between member countries. These situations all displayed the powerless nature of this organisation and supported the realist's perspective on national interests (Weatherbee, 2005).

However, realists had a hard time explaining the ASEAN context after the end of the Cold War when there was more focus on economic activities and multilateral cooperation (He, 2006, p.191). The perspective on power balance and regional security had been dropped and was replaced by blooming economic agreements. Neoliberalism and constructivism had stepped in with an interesting perspective toward ASEAN integration. Neoliberalism stressed the importance of interdependence while constructivism underscored the ASEAN norms.

Neoliberalism was developed from the liberalism perspective, who believed in liberty and equality. Giplin (1987) states that 'Liberal political theory is committed to free markets and minimal states intervention ... individual equality and liberty' (Giplin, 1987, p.37). This school related to the laissez-faire economic system, which is to increase the role of the private sector and reduce government intervention in economic activities (Simon, 1995). They believed that demand could directly drive the market without interference from government (Jackson and Sørensen, 2007, p.184). With this principle, neoliberalism scholar underscored the value of free-market competition and believed in sustainable growth in economic. The free market can provide an efficient platform of resources allocation and develop human progress while the state can only govern the market mechanism and state security (Harvey, 2005). The Government can give direction and provide proper political management for 'wisely managed' markets (Kaynes, 1963 in Jackson and Sørensen, 2007, p.185). States can participate in economic activities in the form of policy to increase the efficiency of the economy for maximum benefit. Hence, the fundamental principles of neoliberalism on reducing any state regulation to increase the competitiveness and the free market associated with the idea of new regionalism in increasing the roles of non-state actors and facilitating the economic cooperation.

Therefore, in applying this philosophy to ASEAN integration, neoliberalists believed that economic sector and state are inevitably interconnected. Dent (2008) states that the economy and security of states in today's world are significantly connected and play a vital role in regional organisations. The free market and movement of capital, resources, and production bases, as well as cooperation with the private sector, encourage regional cooperation. The institution-building of ASEAN was the bottom-up approach (Simon, 1995) and also explained the increase of multilateral institutions in the region (He, 2006). Simon states, 'Neoliberalism foresees cooperation as the dominant form of international politics in Southeast Asia's future' (1995, p.7). ASEAN was the policy organisation sharing the information and the forum for negotiation (Soesasto, 1995). Interdependence was increased in the region through economic activities (Bergin, 1996). Neoliberalists argued against the power balancing theories of realism by expressing that the cooperation within ASEAN was established for reducing the uncertainty and creating its own norms and principles. This phenomenon was not a result of the activities to balance the power, as the realists claimed, on the other hand, it was the effort of institution-building of ASEAN (Dosch, 2004; He, 2006). The establishment of the free trade area stressed the roles of ASEAN as an institution facilitating the cooperation among ASEAN member states. Moreover, it was also the starting point for negotiating the free trade agreement with other countries outside ASEAN.

Although the neoliberalist flourished and served as the explanation for ASEAN's formation after the end of the Cold War, the slow progress in ASEAN's institution-building revealed its weakness. ASEAN failed to express the leading role in pushing many ASEAN activities into real practice. The implementation deficits were claimed as the failure of ASEAN. Moreover, ASEAN failed to show its power as a regional institution in managing the conflict among ASEAN states, the terrorist threats, and the economic crisis (He, 2006). These phenomena seemed to be the unanswered questions regarding the roles of an institution of ASEAN for neoliberalists.

Constructivism is another mainstream perspective to explain ASEAN. Constructivism focused on the importance of ideas, norms, values, and identity in establishing state behaviour (He, 2006). Instead of 'natural' region, it constructed through the collection of human action and identity formation (Söderbaum, 2016; Yeo, 2006). Constructivists believed that the region's history and culture determined the way an organisation worked.

Norms are important and variable. Norms have a constitutive impact on identity (Acharya, 2014). They also relate to regional identity and interest (Checkel, 1999). Therefore, in the view of the constructivist, the theory applied to the integration in the West was not appropriate for Eastern organisations. ASEAN, as a constructivist organisation, was an effective institution. It was a social construct where norms and identity served as the key factors (Acharya, 2001). Many countries in SEA were under Western colonisation for a long time. The independence of states was then valuable, and their national sovereignty needed to be protected. Therefore, the organisation at the regional level of SEA was necessary to maintain this national goal by pooling sovereignty. The key norms of ASEAN focused on non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and respect for state sovereignty with the equality of member states (Stubbs, 2009). The 'ASEAN way' which emphasised the consultation, consensus, and non-interference, was constructed as the main driving force of ASEAN. It was not power balancing or institution building as realism or neoliberalism claimed. ASEAN put emphasis on regional identity. The development of ASEAN focused on building a strong sense of community among member states.

The attempt to create unity in diversity is actively promoted in the ASEAN motto: one vision, one identity, and one community. 'ASEAN embodies fundamental norms, values and practices that have, over time, socialised the ASEAN states into adopting a shared regional identity' (Narine, 2002, p.1). The shared identity is considered a powerful mechanism in reducing the use of force against each other for the peaceful settlement of disputes (He, 2006). ASEAN is an emergence of a secure community when the norms in non-interference and non-use of force play significant roles for overcoming the security dilemma and building collective identity (Acharya, 2001).

The institution building in the form of ARF can explain the success of ASEAN norms. Johnston (2003) suggested that China decided to follow the ASEAN norms when participating in ARF. China still accepted the non-interference principles and concentrated on the comfort level. ARF seemed to be an ineffective forum due to the loose binding condition; however, it was useful for enhancing the cooperation between the diverse actors who had different interests (Johnston, 2003). Likewise, the 'we feeling' became the vital factor for regionalism in East Asia through ASEAN+3 framework. It encouraged others-centred behaviour instead of self-centred behaviour. The ASEAN identity can be

seen through the ASEAN+3 summit, the FTA agreement, and the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), a multicultural currency swap arrangement (Terada, 2003).

However, the role of ASEAN way was questioned and criticised as an obstacle to the development of ASEAN and the resolutions of regional problems (Jones, 2010). ASEAN failed to exercise its power in response to the economic crisis through a 'collective response' (He, 2006). Even the non-interference principle seemed to be the best argument for the failure of ASEAN toward the economic crisis in 1997. The disappointment of its members showed the incapability of ASEAN's identity. The ASEAN way and the regional autonomy and identity was unreachable (Leifer cited by Peou, 2002). The ASEAN Way 'has proven to be a myth ... ASEAN has constituted a community of convenience based on functional considerations rather than a community of shared visions' (Nischalke, 2000, p.107). The ASEAN identity is also challenged by the expansion of member states, which includes the diverse political ideologies (Weatherbee, 2005). The nationalism and national identity of each member state are also considered as a problem for explaining ASEAN through the constructivism perspective.

It is hard to make a conclusion on the theories behind the formation of ASEAN. Each school of thought analyses the development of ASEAN in many aspects. However, these theories reveal the fact that ASEAN has distinctive characteristics and these specific features make it unique and separate from the influence of other regional integration. Unlike the EU in promoting the deeper integration with a single entity, the ASEAN cooperation uses a loose cooperation mechanism with a collaborative entity. The diversity of member states in a political system, religion, and level of economic development seem to be the key factor for forming the collective security alliance or the customs union. The ASEAN way in consensus-based decision-making process and the non-interference in internal affairs of member states are developed to support this kind of cooperation. This way sometimes seems to be the obstacle for the regional integration progress, but it should be a solid mechanism to respond to the nature and norms of the countries in SEA.

It is necessary for researchers to consider the formation of ASEAN, as well as ASEAN today and its operations under the ASEAN framework. ASEAN integration has a considerable impact on all member states, including Thailand. Its influence is evident

in many sectors, such as politics, economy, society, and culture. The effect of the free trade area with free movement of goods, capital, investment, and skilled labour seems to be the issue concerning the Thai government and related sectors, including the higher education sector. The formation of various MRAs within ASEAN plays an integral part in promoting higher levels of regional cohesion and aims to ensure the growth and sustainability of the ASEAN economy. The movement of skilled labour affects the quality and standard of workforce through defining minimum criteria of required competencies. Thus, the higher education sector and HEIs, as the producing agencies of workforce, are necessary components to prepare for this challenge.

As the ASEAN MRA-TP is the agreement at the regional level, the condition and procedures of this agreement are developed in order to meet the needs of member states. The unique characteristics of ASEAN can explain the operations of ASEAN MRA-TP. From the initial project to the signed agreement, the ASEAN way has been adopted as the compromising measure. Thailand took advantage of the consensus decision and delayed the signing of ASEAN MRA-TP, as they are aware of the considerable effect upon the tourism industry. The voluntary status of the implementation of ASEAN MRA-TP is also proof of the importance of the ASEAN way. These phenomena reassure the importance of understanding the roots of ASEAN and its formation process.

Apart from understanding the ASEAN integration and its norms, the response of universities toward ASEAN MRA-TP is of concern. In this research, the operations of Thai HEIs, as the main actor in producing the Thai tourism professionals, are of interest. The measures used for responding to or even changing Thai HEIs to support the ASEAN MRA-TP are the focus. The internationalisation of universities rooted in Thailand for more than 20 years is now an important mechanism of Thai HEIs in order to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The cooperation of Thai HEIs with other ASEAN universities is also increasing under the higher education regionalisation framework. These cooperative frameworks are vital issues for understanding the response of Thai HEIs toward the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, they are worth researching.

3.2 Internationalisation and Higher Education Regionalisation

When the world is becoming more interconnected as a consequence of globalisation, impact on all sectors of human life, such as politics, economics, culture and education, is apparent. The demand for education and education mobility are also increasing, along with the growth of economic integration (Dale and Robertson, 2007). Highly demanding regional competitiveness strongly affects the higher education sector as it is a key mechanism for building and developing human resources in the region. A better-educated workforce and economic globalisation have become the main concerns for the higher education sector (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2008). Hence, the new role of the university and its networking have been addressed. Cross-cultural encounters and cross-border flow of ideas, students, faculty, and staff result in globalisation and enhanced development of universities in international dimensions. Preparing themselves for having an international standard and strengthening relationships with other foreign universities becomes the main concern of universities in the globalisation era. Although the internationalisation issue is not new for universities and higher education policy, it still has a strong impact on the operation of universities. Not only is the cooperation at the international level, but building a network within the region also important. The common challenges and obstacles entailed in regional cooperation, such as free trade policy, a highly competitive labour market, quality of education, and budget allocation, encourage the universities in the same region to foster the relationship.

Over the last two decades, globalisation has impacted higher education (De Wit, 2011a). Globalisation 'is not incidental to our lives today. It is a shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we now live' (Giddens, 1999, p.19). Stiglitz (2002) pointed out that globalisation can create many opportunities in trade, the market place, and technology. In the meantime, there are also adverse results. Every sector can affect the impact of globalisation, including the higher education sector. Globalisation associated with the change in the operation of universities leads to more effective and efficient institutions. (Yang, 2004; Moodie, 2007; Salmi, 2009). More opportunities are created for universities, including yielding more funds from international students, developing world- class standards, and empowering international qualifications. Meanwhile, there are also negative impacts. Higher education is more commercial,

which leads to the erosion of quality and traditional values (De Vijlder, 2001; Yang, 2004). However, it is undeniable that these phenomena create a shift in the operations of universities. Changes also strengthen the role of internationalisation in the higher education agenda.

‘Internationalisation is changing the world of higher education, and globalisation is changing the world of internationalisation’ (Knight, 2008, p.1). Internationalisation is defined as ‘the variety of policies and programmes that universities and governments implement to respond to globalisation’ (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009, p.7). Internationalisation in higher education is then ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery of postsecondary education’ (Knight, 2003, p.2-3). It is ‘any systematic, sustained effort aimed at making higher education (more) responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalisation of societies, economy and labour markets’ (Van Der Wende, 1996, p.23). According to Knight (2008), the academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella can be divided into ‘at home and abroad’. Internationalisation at home or internal internationalisation relate to the activities happening on campus. These activities are mostly curriculum oriented and are intended to develop international awareness and intercultural aspect. They cover the curriculum and programmes, teaching/learning processes, extra-curricular activities, liaison with local culture/ethnic group, and research and scholar activity. When the campus-based international activities have been introduced, there is an emergence of cross-border activities or internationalisation abroad. This aspect includes international activities outside the countries. The movement of people, the delivery of programmes, mobility of providers, and international aspects are under these kinds of international activities. Although the international activities of higher education are clearly divided, these two aspects of internationalisation are linked and interdependent.

When internationalisation becomes an important issue for higher education in expressing complex concepts, the confusion about the internationalisation of higher education expands (Knight, 2008). As the word ‘internationalisation’ is widely used and mostly linked to everything worldwide, the real meaning and direction of internationalisation of higher education are often misinterpreted. Knight (2011)

outlines the five myths of internationalisation in higher education which are often comprehended by others. The first myth is that international students are internationalisation agents. This is a theory that purports the more international students in the university, the more internationalised the institution. The belief that the more the university is recognised as international, the better the reputation and quality of the education. The second myth suggests that international reputation is a determinant of quality. The higher the number of international institutional agreements supporting the internationalisation of university determines the quality of the university is the third myth. A university's international accreditation as evidence of internationalisation is the fourth myth. This is the notion that a high number of accreditations from foreign agencies means that there is a high level of internationalisation of the university. The last myth deals with global branding. The internationalisation plan of universities is for promoting the university on a global level. Apart from Knight (2011), De Wit (2011b) also proposed the nine misconceptions of internationalisation, which related to the first and third myths of Knight. These misconceptions mostly relate to the belief in the similarity between internationalisation and teaching in English, studying abroad, teaching international subjects, having many international students, or having many agreements with foreign universities. These myths and misconceptions about the internationalisation of higher education seem to reflect the connotative association towards the word 'international' or something that relates to the academic activities on a global level. However, the internationalisation of higher education is the process-based approach, focusing on improving the quality of higher education, as well as students and staff. It is not the activity's orientation or the number of academic activities on an international level.

In the beginning stage, the rationale driving internationalisation was grouped into four types: social/cultural, political, academic, and economic (De Wit, 1999; Knight, 1999; Knight and De Wit, 1997). Later, with the high competition at the international level, the new rationales developed at the national and institutional levels. The national level rationale covers human resources development, commercial trade, national building, and social/cultural development. Meanwhile, the rationale at the institutional level includes institutional branding and profile, income generation, student and staff

development, and knowledge production (Knight, 2004). Nevertheless, the rationales behind internationalisation are different depending on the background of the institution and the country involved (Knight, 2004, p.28). This is true not only for the rationales but the approaches to addressing the process of internationalisation also depend on the specific characteristics and challenges of each country (Knight, 2004, p.18).

Thailand experienced a unique pattern of development of institutionalisation in higher education. The concept of internationalisation in higher education has been in the spotlight from the mid-1980s (Lavankura, 2013, p. 664). It first appeared as part of government policy and plan in 1990, when Thailand's first 15-year long-range plan for higher education (1990-2004) had launched. In this plan, internationalisation was an interesting trend that applied to all aspects of higher education missions, teaching, and learning (Ministry of University Affairs, 1991). The development of internationalisation was more explicit in the seventh higher education development plan (1992-1996). The measure and guideline for internationalisation developed when internationalisation was considered the mechanism to improve the quality of education and increasing the academic standard (Tong-In, Sinlarat and Ponoy, 1995).

The reasons behind the work of government on internationalisation were not only the global trend but also the rapid change in political and socio-economic phenomenon (Lavankura, 2013). At the beginning stage of internationalisation in Thailand, the economy became the main consideration of the Thai government. The Thai government participated in many agreements in foreign trade and investments to support the manufacturing and export sectors (Pasuk and Baker, 1998). In this period, higher education was considered the driving force behind economic development. Then, internationalisation was fully supported by the government (Amornwich and Wichit, 1997).

Later, the transition in the political situation from monarchy to military dictatorships and sometimes democracy, as well as the economic crisis in 1997, changed the direction of government toward internationalisation (Rhein, 2016). The Thai government judged the floating of Bath in the Asian economic crisis as a threat from outsiders. The Thai government decided to solve the country's crisis and step back from the internationalisation process (Lavankura, 2013; Rhein, 2016). The role of

internationalisation in higher education was then shifted to support the local community and strengthen the local wisdom. There is clear evidence in the ninth higher education development plan (2002-2006). The attempt to mix the ‘market’ concept with local wisdom was demonstrated in this plan (Ministry of University Affairs, 2002, p.16). At this stage, Thai’s higher education came to a fork in the road when Thai society faced a dilemma between two different directions: ‘seeking a balance of autonomy and dependency, of idealism and pragmatic and of economic competitiveness and cultural self-reliance’ (Witte, 2000, p.242). Internationalisation in this period was a topic of discussion in the sense of appreciation and anxiety. There was a sense of being modern by working on internationalisation; however, the fear that an unintended impact would erode the Thai culture and identity was also a concern. Therefore, the balance between the use of internationalisation with localisation and the protection of local wisdom and culture was considered. As Falk (1992, p.35) claimed, ‘this coincides with the nature of internationalisation which might either increase the nation’s prosperity and security or increase the vulnerability of a state to economic and political forces beyond its control’. The development of internationalisation in Thai’s higher education system in the current period then shows the strong effort of government to find the middle road of implementation. The idea of localisation expanded to the second long-range higher education plan (2008-2022) together with the strong role of internationalisation in Thai higher education. This plan expressed the strong concern of government toward other challenges, the integration of ASEAN, free trade in education services, the leading role of China and India in technology, and even national competitiveness (Commission on Higher Education, 2008) . These challenges strengthened the significance of the implementation of internationalisation in higher education. Since then, internationalisation has become the driving factor for improving the quality of Thai higher education.

The academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella are the focus of Thai universities when the roles of these universities have expanded to support the needs of government and society as well as pursue academic mission (Sriyaranya, 2000, p.2). The significant move toward internationalisation in Thai higher education is evidenced by the increasing number of international programmes, using English as

a medium language of instruction, or being the partner with other foreign universities (Ministry of University Affairs, 1991), together with the international students and agreements with foreign universities. The international programmes have become more fashionable in Thailand since the 1990s, which was the same period of emerging internationalisation in Thai's higher education plan (Lavankura, 2013, p.667).

The last report of OHEC in 2014 revealed that there were 769 international programmes offered by 44 universities; 27 public universities, and 17 private universities. These programmes included 249 programmes for bachelor's degrees, 290 for master's degrees, 224 for doctoral degrees, and 6 for other types of degrees (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2015). Apart from international programmes, Thai universities also strengthened their relationship with foreign partners by providing collaborative degree programmes. There are 138 programmes in total, which can be classified as eight joint degrees, 77 dual degrees, 51 national degrees, and two triple degrees. These collaborative programmes were offered by 29 public universities and 11 private universities (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017). In terms of international students, by the report of OHEC in 2017, 20,199 international students are enrolled in Thai universities; 9,704 students are enrolled in public universities, and 11,287 students in private universities. For Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs), Thai universities signed 2,217 agreements with foreign universities all over the world. These statistics reflected the popularity of internationalisation in Thai higher education.

One of the reasons behind the growth and popularity of international programmes in Thai higher education is the demand of students and the private sector (Lavankura, 2013). The high demand of the labour market for skilled professionals urged Thai universities to reform the curricula and focus more on international dimensions (Amornwich and Wichit, 1997, p.164-165). The success of these programmes is proven by the continuous growth of the number of international programmes offered by Thai universities. From 1990 to 2010, the number of international programmes increased from 33 to 981 (Lavankura, 2013). Another interesting reason is the income generation (Knight, 2004, p.26). The impact of liberalisation and privatisation of the higher education sector seems to be the best force for universities to fiercely compete in the market (Altbach and Knight, 2007). The global financial crisis in 2008, the

unemployment rate of graduates, and the reduction in funding for higher education encouraged Thai universities to work hard for their survival (Rhein, 2016, p.267). The support of government deregulation in the programme by open 'special' or 'full-free' enrolment for public universities and the coming of private universities with full authorisation in providing their programmes also strengthened the interest in providing the international programmes of Thai universities. These circumstances led to the increase of international programmes in Thailand.

When quantitative statistics were used, the situation of internationalisation in Thailand seemed to be satisfied. The increasing number of international programmes, the large number of international students, and the amounts of MOUs signed by Thai universities and their foreign partners expressed the effort of the government in encouraging the internationalisation in higher education. Although these numbers did not express the quality of higher education through internationalisation. The questions on the 'process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension' in Thai higher education remain (Knight, 2004, p.11). The government and related agencies still need to clarify this point. No matter what, the solid background of internationalisation in Thai universities may be the best mechanism to respond to any international agenda of Thai universities.

Together with internationalisation, regional cooperation in higher education also plays a vital role in responding to globalisation. ASEAN has experienced the same pressure driving the Bologna Process (Feuer and Hornidge, 2015). The rapid development of internationalisation in higher education has encouraged higher education collaboration at the regional level. The process of regionalisation and internationalisation in higher education is compatible. The processes are conducted by similar actors through similar activities and outcomes. The slight difference is that regionalisation focuses on intra-regional initiatives (Knight, 2012a, p.19). To clarify, government and HEIs play significant roles in supporting and implementing internationalisation in higher education. In contrast, regional organisations are the leading actors in higher education regionalisation, initiating academic activities, and providing linkage between higher education institutions in the same region (Nguyen, 2008).

The best practice of higher education regionalisation seems to be the work of the EU on the Bologna Process and European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The idea of European higher education regionalism has been discussed since 1955 (Chou and Ravinet, 2017). However, due to the reluctance of the government, this idea of higher education regionalism was not transferred into practice. In 1987, the Erasmus Programme, the funding student mobility, was implemented as the policy for European higher education regionalism. The launch of the Erasmus programme considered political interests and activity in order to strengthen the role of the EU as the active political entity in Europe (Papatsiba, 2005). The regionalisation of higher education in Europe was intense when the Bologna Process was launched. The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental cooperation of higher education in Europe. The main goal of the Bologna Process is to promote the mobility of students and staff and ensure the comparability between the higher education system within Europe, which leads to the establishment of EHEA. The characteristic of EHEA is the compatibility and comparability between the higher education systems of the countries who signed the agreement. Therefore, in the context of the Bologna Process, student mobility is considered the main reason for establishing the EHEA and the main outcome the EU seeks to accomplish (Papatsiba, 2006). The student mobility scheme, ERASMUS, then became the brand of European higher education regionalism, and this idea was expanded within and outside of Europe (Chou and Ravinet, 2017).

The academic cooperation in higher education within the region can be explained with various terminologies. Knight (2012a, p.18) suggested the four lines of inquiry that can be used to view regionalisation: the impact of regionalism on higher education, higher education regionalisation, higher education as an instrument for regional integration, and interregional cooperation in higher education. The first three terms suggest the various roles and relationship between higher education as an actor and the region. The latter term explains the cooperation in higher education within two regions. Knight (2012a, p. 19) explained higher education regionalisation as 'the process of building closer collaboration and alignment among higher education actors and systems within a defined area or framework called a region'. Sirat, Azman and Baker (2014) suggested that the concept of regionalisation in higher education is based on the number of involved actors in the process. To explain, several actors can

encourage more cooperation which stems from the educational institutions. It is suggested as a bottom-up process. Meanwhile, Woldegiorgis (2013) argued that the Bologna Process of the EU is good practice for higher education regionalisation, which starts with regional organisations or supranational bodies.

‘Harmonisation’ is also used to explain the process of higher education regionalisation when the term reflects the comparability and compatibility (Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014). It is the process for seeking common educational space through the diversity of higher education systems and cultures within the region (Wallace, 2000; Enders, 2004). The term ‘harmonisation’ seems inappropriate for the context of Europe as this word has a sense of conformity and provides little opportunity for countries to develop their own initiatives. (Dang, 2017). However, it is acceptable for Asians and can be used to speak about diversity.

‘Harmonisation’ first appeared in the ASEAN higher education in the lecture series of the SEAMEO RIHED in 2007. This word was used in various contexts for explaining phenomena like integration, cooperation, partnership, or collaboration. However, ‘harmonisation’ expressed a sense of tighter and deeper integration (Knight, 2012a). In terms of a higher education context, harmonisation did not share the same meaning with uniformity or unification of all higher education systems; on the other hand, it was intended to explain the coordination of educational programmes with minimum standards and equivalence and comparability of qualification between and within countries (Woldegiorgis, 2013). It covered the conformity of credit systems, accreditation, degree comparability, and quality assurance systems. Harmonisation in ASEAN higher education is not intended to create the high standard of higher education like the Bologna Process of the EU; however, it encourages building the link between the higher education system of each member state under the non-interference norms (Dang, 2017). It was then the process to promote the competitiveness of regional higher education by creating common values through the regional regulatory mechanism (Hoosen, Butcher and Njenga, 2009).

Higher education became the focal point in ASEAN regional education cooperation after the establishment of AFTA (Dang, 2017). The need for skilled labourers enhanced the important role of higher education in regional agendas. The regionalisation of higher education is under the ASCC pillar, one of the three main ASEAN pillars. It was

identified as the main mechanism to improve human resource development and initiated the idea of a common space of higher education (Sirat, Azman and Baker, 2014). ASEAN member countries put more effort into enhancing the regionalisation of higher education within a complicated situation (Knight, 2013). As the Bologna Process, the different backgrounds of member states in culture, language, and legacy system of university education are considered the main challenges for ASEAN to cope with (Feuer and Hornidge, 2015; Iskandar, 2009; Selvaratnam and Gopinathan, 1984). Moreover, ASEAN has also faced the internal conflict between member countries and the difference in economic prosperity and social development. The cooperation of ASEAN higher education developed through various processes of institution-building and identity formation and consensual and informal decision-making (Dang, 2017). The initiative of ASEAN higher education integration was expressed in the form of consortia and quality assurance mechanisms (Feuer and Hornidge, 2015). Subsequently, the regional institutions SEAMEO RIHED and ASEAN University Network (AUN) were established to promote higher education cooperation in ASEAN (Nguyen, 2008, Dang, 2017). The structure of ASEAN regional education cooperation is suggested in Figure 4.

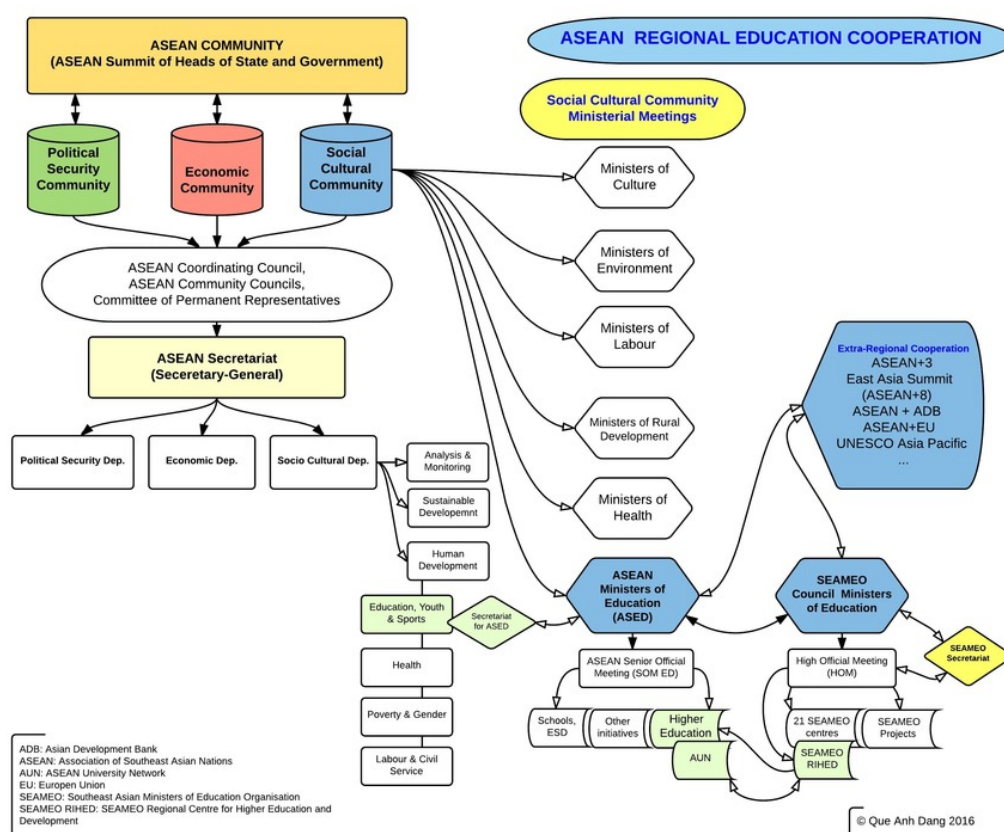


Figure 4: ASEAN Regional Education Cooperation Structure

(Source: Dang, 2017)

SEAMEO is an important international organisation working to promote regional cooperation in education, sciences, and culture in Southeast Asia. The 20 centres in specific areas of education under this umbrella were established to promote the harmonisation of 10 different education systems. SEAMEO RIHED was established in 1993 as a key promoter for harmonisation in higher education and creating a higher education common space. The purpose of this organisation is to foster efficiency, effectiveness and harmonisation of higher education in Southeast Asia through system research, empowerment, development of mechanisms to facilitate sharing and collaboration in higher education (SEAMEO RIHED, 2012). Programmes and activities under SEAMEO RIHED support five main objectives: empowering higher education institutions, developing harmonisation mechanisms, cultivating globalised human resources, advancing knowledge frontiers in higher education system management, and promoting university social responsibility and sustainable development. Building strong linkages between institutions in the region and strengthening the development of institutions in each member state are the main goals of this organisation in order to enhance cooperation in the region.

Over the past ten years, SEAMEO RIHED has initiated a number of programmes and activities which promote regional cooperation in higher education. In order to strengthen the harmonisation of higher education in the region, four priority areas are the focus: academic mobility enhancement, leadership development, e-learning and mobile learning, and research (SEAMEO RIHED, 2017). Under the academic mobility enhancement area, ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) has been introduced. This self-sufficient platform has a leading role in enhancing student exchange and promoting balanced mobility within the region. It also produces internationally experienced graduates, who are the necessary workforce for ASEAN integration. This multilateral programme currently has eight member countries and 68 HEIs with more than 2,300 exchange students in ten fields of study. For the areas of leadership development and e-learning and mobile learning, the taskforces for enhancing leadership mobility and training, and for information and communications technology (ICT) and online learning development in the region, are nearly assembled.

ASEAN Research Cluster (ARC) and ASEAN Citation Index (ACI) are the activities developed under the area of research. Although ARC is reconsidering the purpose of this platform, as it was unsuccessful due to the lack of participation from member countries, ACI is making good progress. Over 52,000 bibliographic records from four countries with 253 journals in 6 countries are already within this database. Moreover, SEAMEO RIHED, in cooperation with various outside stakeholders, developed many activities related to quality assurance. The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRf) has been developed as a common reference framework for enabling the comparison of qualification and strengthening the convergence of the higher education systems across ASEAN member states. The Academic Credit Transfer for Asia (ACTFA) is the project used for harmonising the credit transfer exercised in the Great Mekong Subregion (GMS). Apart from these key activities, many programmes with training courses and workshops on governance and management of HEIs have also been provided for developing the capability of member states' universities.

In addition to the cooperation at the ministerial level, AUN plays a significant role in promoting higher education cooperation at the institutional level. This organisation was established in 1995 in the fourth ASEAN summit meeting to support the idea of ASEAN leaders and their importance to human development and cooperation in higher education. The main purpose of AUN is to promote the existing network among universities in each country through collaboration between scholars and students, develop academic and human resources, and serve as a forum for the exchange and sharing of information within ASEAN (AUN, 2017). Although only 30 universities across ASEAN are accepted as members of AUN, the AUN academic activities are not restricted to the AUN members. AUN member universities have the advantage in proposing new initiatives and pilot projects, which require cooperation from other member universities through cost-sharing management. It is a fact that most activities are offered only to university members. However, the AUN report in 2013 suggests that 63% of academic activities are open to non-AUN member universities. This rate seems inappropriate for promoting higher education cooperation in the region. Nevertheless, it is a good sign of the openness and progress of AUN activities.

AUN's activities span from policy level to faculty, staff, and student level. The AUN network operates on a cost-sharing basis, which is an essential part of the flow of

cooperation in higher education. The activities of AUN are developed to encourage higher education cooperation and enhance regional integration. Its activities focus on five main areas, which are youth mobility; academic collaboration; standards, mechanisms, systems and policies of higher education collaboration; courses and programmes development; and regional and global policy platform. AUN also recognises the importance of being a part of ASEAN and the mutual understanding of the diverse education in the region. Therefore, The ASEAN Educational Forum, Youth Cultural Forum, and others have been initiated into building a strong background of ASEAN diversity. Promoting collaboration among academics, students, and staff through many programmes, such as the ASEAN studies programme, student, faculty, and staff exchange programmes, and the AUN distinguished scholar programme is also part of AUN's function.

In terms of promoting harmonisation in higher education, AUN is one of the key actors in developing the quality assurance system in higher education among member universities, namely, AUN Quality Assurance Network (AUN-QA). This platform is not reserved only for AUN member universities. Non-member universities may also apply to join. The AUN-QA network promotes the holistic quality assurance system in HEIs. It serves as an instrument for maintaining and improving academic standards. It is outcome-based learning which focuses on the link between expected learning outcomes, learning strategies, and student assessment. This platform is now officially accepted and recognised by many high-level committees: ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (ASED), ASEAN plus three Senior Official Meeting on Education (SOM ED+3), and ASEAN plus three Education Ministers Meeting (ASED+3). Moreover, AUN also enhances and facilitates student mobility under AUN student exchange programme through the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS). ACTS is the web-based system which has been designed to accommodate differences in the implementation of credit systems among the member universities without any requirement to modify the existing institutional or national credit system. There are 21,306 courses, from AUN member universities and three Japanese universities, offered for student exchange under ACTS. These are categorised as 17,290 undergraduate courses, 4,056 graduate courses, three internship programmes, and one short course programme (AUN, 2017).

The cooperation at the international and regional level is the key strategy for international development of Thai HEIs, implemented by promoting international programmes through faculty and student exchange, collaborative research, curriculum development, and cooperative education. The rapid growth of internationalisation in Thai HEIs, as well as the participation of Thai HEIs in the academic activities at the regional level, expresses the hard effort of Thai HEIs in developing themselves for international standards and paves the way for being recognised in the global community. It also reveals the readiness of Thai HEIs for any circumstances in the international agenda. Observing the international activities through internationalisation in higher education and higher education regionalisation can help in understanding the roles of Thai HEIs and the changes needed in response to the regional activities like ASEAN MRA-TP.

3.3 Theory of Institutional Change

It is unavoidable to accept that regional integration affects most sectors in society, including higher education sectors which serve as key agents for producing the human resources for country's competitiveness. ASEAN integration and its activities, such as free trade policy with free flow of labour, the high demand of skilled human resources, competitive market, and regionalisation in education are considered the external environment which directly affects the operation of Thai HEIs and the overall higher education sector. Apart from these external environments, higher competition in the higher education market, HEIs governance and the change in budget allocation also urge Thai HEIs to develop in order to respond to these factors. The environments around the Thai HEIs have become increasingly uncertain, which challenges the traditional role and the operation of Thai HEIs. Moreover, this research intends to explore the changes facing Thai HEIs in response to ASEAN MRA-TP. The theory of institutions and institutional change are important for understanding the changing behaviours and the adaptation of HEIs to their environment.

Institutions are a concept used in explaining customs and the pattern of behaviours in society. Institution comprises 'regulative, normative and cultural cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life' (Scott, 1995, p.33). Institutions are the constellations of established practices guided by enduring, formalised, rational beliefs that transcend particular organisations and situations (Lammers and Barbour, 2006, p.357). The key feature of

an institution is that it's constructed by people and organisations (North, 1990; Leftwich and Sen, 2010). Institutions are 'more-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behaviour(s) that (are) underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understanding that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order' (Greenwood et al, 2008, p. 5). They provide a predictable structure of human interaction, even if they possess an inefficient or uncontested structure. More importantly, their behaviours are resistant to change. Although they express the enduring patterns of behaviour over time, their structure can change in the way society evolves (North, 1990). Institutions are both formal and informal. The formal institutions surface in the form of written laws, policies, and regulations conducted by the official authorities. In the meantime, social norms, traditions, or customs are considered as the informal institutions (Leftwich and Sen, 2010; Berman, 2013). These two kinds of institutions can be substituted or they may overlap based on the context (Jütting, et al., 2007; Unsworth, 2010). Moreover, the norms can be the foundation in forming the formal institutions (Jütting, et al., 2007, p.7).

Institutional theory is then developed as the approach to understanding the resilience of social structures. It examines the establishment of structures, including schemes, rules, norms and routines (Scott, 1995). This theory intends to understand the way these elements are created, adopted, and adapted over the space and time, as well as the way of decline. The development of the trend in institutionalism can be classified as the old institutionalism and the new institutionalism (Greenwood, et al, 2008). The old institutionalism focused on the internal process of organisation which became institutionalised. In other words, it focused on roles, structures, processes, and norms of organisation. The new institutionalism, however, proposes that institutions are 'the collective cognition or shared assumptions that, over time, acquire a degree of social concreteness' (Suddaby, 2013, p.381). This stream of thought focuses on the interaction between the organisations in the field. Both approaches agree that institutionalisation constrains organisation rationality, even though the sources of constraints are different (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). The old internationalism emphasises 'the vesting of interests within the organisation as a result of political trade-offs and alliances (similar to the rational school) and the new stressing the relationship

between stability and legitimacy and the power of common understanding that are seldom explicitly articulated (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.12).

Old institutionalism is influenced by many organisations and their environments before the 1970s (Suddaby, 2003). The influence in establishing this stream of thought is a sociological perspective (Parson, 1956; Selznick, 1949, 1957; Berger and Luckman, 1967). It focuses on social construction and institutional norms and values (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). During this period, the institutional theory expressed that the informal institutions such as patterns, coalitions, process of recruitment or promotion often shape the behaviour of people within organisations (Aldrich, 1999). The interesting work in this period illustrated the organisational change through the work of Selznick on the Tennessee Valley Authority (1949). He suggested that 'the important thing about organisations is that though they are tools each nevertheless has a life of its own ... They universally resist complete control' (Selznick, 1949, p.10). He observed that environmental factors are important for the process of internationalisation. The values, goals, and procedures are strongly established as a result of environmental influences. His study revealed that the organisation is affected by the environment as an 'adaptive social structure'. The structural constraints which produced the tensions and dilemmas are also mentioned in his work. The work of Selznick influenced the development of institutional study which led to the new line of institutional study, new institutionalism.

The new line of institutional study or the new institutionalism developed through many areas such as new institutional economics (North, 1981; Schotter, 1981), positive theory of institutions (Williamson 1975; Ostrom 1986), and sociological institution (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer and Scott, 1983; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). These theories were recognised as influential in the issue of institutional development (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowen, 1977; Beckert, 2010). At the beginning stage, this theory was developed for organisation study. Later, it was used as the analytic framework for global processes through the view of the analysis of institutional change (Boyle and Meyer, 1998; Meyer, 2009). The new institutionalism 'tends to focus on a broad but finite slice of sociology's institutional cornucopia; organisational structures and processes that are industry-wide, national or international scope' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.9). This study believes that open environments influence the institution. The idea behind new institutionalism is that the organisation is

constituted by the environment in which it was embedded. The efficiency and stability of organisation is strongly related to the conformity to outside institutional rules. Therefore, the better way to reduce the conflict between institutional rules and operation is to develop some buffering strategies, such as the myth of best practices (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Moreover, the new institutionalism focuses on the formal structure, homogeneity of organisations, and the stability of institutional components (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). It emphasises the explanation of the similarity of organisations based on institutional conditions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Levy, 2006).

However, the homogeneity of organisations has often been debated as institutional arrangements can act as powerful agents of change (Dacin, Goodstein and Scott, 2002). This theory is overly focused on the continuity, conformity, and stability of an institution and the influence of institutional contexts towards the structure of and behaviour within an organisation (Kavangh, 2009). It fails to consider the potential of deviance, differentiation, and variety among institutions, and thus institutional heterogeneity. Institutional change and deinstitutionalisation can occur when these institutions are faced with the pressures associated with the differentiation of groups or discordant beliefs and practices (Oliver 1992). Changes in macrosocial trends are explicit: little ambiguity regarding goals, less structured institutions, little state influence, dependency on resources, variety of managerial background, and alternative models of legitimate organisations – which diminish the forces of homogeneity and strengthen the heterogeneity in organisations (Kavangh, 2009).

The concept of heterogeneity has been developed through strategy research. These kinds of studies – e.g. Selznick (1957), Beard and Dess (1981), Porter (1980), Hayden, (1986), and Barney (1991) – focus on understanding the differences in organisations as well as the variables that differ between organisations. The concepts of distinctive competence and competitive advantage have been used to underline the assumptions of heterogeneity in organisations (Selznick, 1957; Porter, 1980). These two concepts support the finding that the differences among organisations are considered the key factors for the success of organisations (Buchko, 2011). The heterogeneity in the structure, values, and performance of organisations are then explicit in order to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of the organisations. Buchko (2011) suggested four frameworks for examining the heterogeneity strategy. The first theme is

the resource-based view (RBV). This idea suggests that the uniqueness of resources is key to sustaining a competitive advantage. The organisation that can access and control scarce resources is in the dominant position in the market (Barney, 1991). However, knowledge, performance, and an organisational network are also required for the organisation to manage limited resources. The structure of industry is the second theme. The industry structure is necessary in order for the organisation to put itself in a unique position within a specific industry (Porter, 1980). The competitive market view is suggested as the third theme for heterogeneity. The competitive behaviours of organisations, including the position and the growth characteristics of organisations, within a specific product-market are unique and lead to differences in organisations. The last theme is managerial characteristics. An individual manager can lead to the different direction of each organisation. These factors can also be applied in many sectors, including higher education. The differences in goals, direction, and management teams of HEIs as well as the level of control within HEIs can result in changes towards heterogeneity.

It is possible that the change in Thai HEIs can be expressed in terms of both homogeneity and heterogeneity. The difference in Thai HEIs in terms of budget allocation from the government and the autonomy of the university can be key factors of heterogeneity in Thai HEIs. However, the same environment in the same field (Thai higher education) tends to result in homogeneity in Thai HEIs. The role of producing human resources to support the development of the country is shared by all Thai HEIs. The long period of development of Thai universities and the similar university structures as well as the expectation and perception of society towards the work of the university shapes the homogeneous elements within Thai HEIs. The bureaucracy norms embedded in the Thai higher education sector also support shared paradigms and beliefs, leading to similarities in structure, goals, and values. The interpretation and translation of the global message of Thai HEIs tends to be similar. Moreover, the latest higher education reform, which reduced the intervention of the government in Thai HEIs, also encouraged an isomorphic process in Thai HEIs. The Thai government decided to launch a new policy to support the autonomy of Thai HEIs. Allowing for freedom in academic activities and reducing the government budget encouraged Thai HEIs to find a suitable way to ensure their survival. Lessons learned from other universities and similar policies and plans resulted in the introduction of a

homogeneous atmosphere in the Thai higher education sector. Therefore, institutional isomorphism seems to be an interesting concept by which to understand the change that occurred in Thai HEIs.

The first discussion in the organisation isomorphism came from the work of Hawley (1968). He noted that when the diversity of organisations forms across different environments, the homogeneity of organisation forms within the same environment. Isomorphism is then 'a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions' (Hawley, 1968 cited by DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p.149). The well-known institutional isomorphism study was the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). This framework posits in the category of sociological institution, which concerns 'norms, cognitive frames and meaning system and the way in which they are created and changed' (Schmidt, 2008, p.320).

The study of isomorphism is a descriptive theory explaining the change of institutions. It focuses on the institutional homogeneity in structures, practices, and procedures over time, which leads to the similar structure of organisations. Organisations in the same organisational field are linked through their similar activities and outcomes as well as common challenges and values. They tend to transform from uniqueness to sameness. The organisations 'compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, (and) social as well as economic fitness' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 151). This theory is suitable for studying the politics of organisational change and structure. Moreover, the rationale behind this theory opposes the view of Weber on bureaucratisation of institutional rationality. For Weber, increasing bureaucratisation in the structure can be an important measure to achieve the goals of institution and make it efficient. The adapted similar bureaucratic structure is the way to make these institutions become more similar. However, DiMaggio and Powell argued that modern institutions still share common bureaucratised structures and also change in ways that make them more similar without necessarily increasing their efficiency. They believe that being more efficient is not the reason for institutional changes; instead, the conformity between an institution and its environment is really important.

As classified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), there are three specific mechanisms for isomorphic change: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. These three forces are considered the isomorphism process, not the types or forms of isomorphism (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999). Coercive isomorphism is applied when other institutions are oppressed by both formal and informal pressure for making structural changes to an institution. This kind of pressure can be in the form of force, persuasion, government mandate, or contract law. In other words, external pressure can lead to the change of an institution. The second process is mimetic, the copying process for establishing organisational legitimacy. As Hanson states, 'Organisation consciously models itself after another that believes in representing a high level of success and achievement in the public eye' (2000, p.649). Mimetic processes are introduced when the organisation faces uncertainty and tries to imitate other successful or more legitimate institutions in the same field. It is important when 'actors cannot be sure of what the outcomes of the adoption of different processes or systems will be' (Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge, 2005, p. 3). Uncertainty may appear when institution technologies are not well recognised, for example, when goals are highly aimed or when environment change. The opposite of coercive pressure, the need to change an institution does not come from external environment; it is rather imposed by the internal pressure of the institution. Normative pressures are recognised as the third source of institutional isomorphism. This pressure ties together the change of institution with professionalisation. According to Larson (1977) and Collins (1979), professionalisation is the collective struggle of a member of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work and to control the production of producers. The process of this force is conducted by the members of the same profession who share both educational background and area of profession. Interaction between professionals can impact different institutions in the same way. Examples of normative pressures are in the form of professional training or development, accredited certifications, or professional network.

Although these three mechanisms are introduced from different conditions and affect the characteristics of organisations in different ways, they can 'overlap and intermingle' (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004, p.285). The coercive isomorphism is often related to the external pressure or 'the environment surrounding the organisational field'. Mimetic and normative isomorphism comes from the internal pressures. These two mechanisms can 'help to explain the spread of roles and structures' (Frumkin and

Galaskiewicz, 2004, p.285). Moreover, coercive pressure seems to create a huge impact on the process and strategy of organisation. It 'highlights the impact of political rather than technical influences on organisational change' (Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge, 2009, p.167). Mimetic isomorphism has a higher impact on the process and strategy than normative pressure. This pressure tends to adopt similar innovations deemed legitimate instead of focusing on performance improvement (Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge, 2009). In the meantime, normative isomorphism exerts a strong pressure on the organisational culture (Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, the process of isomorphism happens when organisations in the same organisational field face the same environmental condition. The organisational field is defined as a group of organisations where the institution was structured and defined (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p.148). They are 'a community of organisations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field' (Scott, 1995, p.56). The institutional structure is determined when it has 'an increase in the extent of interaction among organisations in the field, the emergence of sharply defined inter-organisational structures of domination and pattern of coalition, an increase in the information load with which organisations in a field must contend, and the development of a mutual awareness among participants in a set of organisations that are involved in a common enterprise' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p.148). The regulatory agencies, special interest groups, or the group of organisations who produce similar products, such as education, are some examples of organisational fields.

The educational organisational field is considered an interesting unit for analysing the process of institutional isomorphism, as it faces strong institutional pressure and has a highly structured organisational field (Zajac and Kraatz, 1993; Caravella, 2011). Educational institutions are tied down by the network in their field, by law and regulations, or even by expectations of society (Hanson, 2001, p.648). The educational organisational fields include many stakeholders and agencies, such as accreditation agencies, teacher training, boards of education, other colleges and universities, textbook producers, and federal agencies (Hanson, 2001). The pressure in the educational organisational field increases when the educational institutions have to compete with other institutions for sharing resources, customers, or clients. Hanson (2001, p.649) suggested that the increasing similarity of educational organisations is the

result of the process of ·the greater the constraining pressures from environment, the fewer the degrees of freedom for educational change· (2001, p.649).

According to the work of Hanson (2001), institutional isomorphism sheds light on the organisational change in education systems. He suggested there are three external environmental forces affecting the organisational change: environmental shifts, environmental regression, and environmental shocks. Environmental shifts refer to the way that one or more organisations in the same educational system adapts to the expectation or requirement set upon the school. The example of this is when there are changing laws or mandates required for schools. Environmental regression serves as the second force for change. This happens when ·the activities of an organisation are so far beyond the accepted norms of the institution that its legitimacy in the institution is questioned· (Hanson, 2001, p.654). The change needs to be in line with the accepted standards. The final suggested force for organisational change is environmental shock. The change under this type of force is encouraged where ·the education system's external environment gets seriously ahead of any incremental adaptation the schools can make (Hanson, 2001, p.655). These changes are related to the shifts in technology, law, and public awareness. ·When a strong environmental shock runs through our system of education, the institutionalised forces that have held schools to the status quo tend to be weakened and major changes become possible· (Hanson, 2001, p.656).

Institutional isomorphism has also been used to explain many circumstances in higher education. The isomorphic process is often related to the impact of globalisation on the organisations. As the work of Cai (2009) explains, global pressure and local demands have a strong influence in shaping the isomorphic process in Chinese higher education reform. With the intention to understand the changing process of governance, there are three main areas of governance: privatisation in educational provision, financial diversification, and decentralisation of administration. Interestingly, international organisations like UNESCO and the World Bank seem to be the most influential for the Chinese governance reform in higher education. As the process of governance reform in higher education has plenty of uncertainty and ambiguities for the government, ·the rational processes of policy making are more likely to be bounded by legitimised global reform ideologies and international experiences· (Cai, 2009, p. 11). The coercive pressure is shown in the international regulations. With a role as one of the founding

members of UNESCO, the Chinese government pays more attention to the guidelines of UNESCO's World Conferences in Higher Education in order to embrace the global reform of higher education. Another important role of international organisation is the normative forces through the consultancy involvement of the World Bank and the interchange of personnel. The mimetic pressure that comes through borrowing foreign models is also illustrated.

Croucher and Woelert (2015) reconfirmed the uniformity of Australia's national system in higher education through the isomorphic lens. These two researchers intended to reanalyse the isomorphic tendencies of Australia's higher education system after the Dawkins Reform in late 1980. They focused on analysing the change in faculties and departments and changes in the number of academic staff and students in different academic organisational groupings across the public Australian university system. The previous research of Marginson and Considine (2000), which was the framework of Croucher and Woelert's research, claimed the mimetic force as the key adaption strategy for the newer and less prestigious Australian universities when facing the environmental uncertainties from the Dawkins Reform. Although, through the views of Croucher and Woelert, the change in formal organisations of Australian higher education still falls under isomorphic pressure (not only under the mimetic rubric but that of the coercive isomorphism). They confirmed that the formal organisational structures and academic offerings of Australian higher education is still similar and more uniform, even though there are dramatic changes in the sector.

Karatas Acer and Güçlü (2017) also applied the new institutionalism to explain the expansion of higher education in Turkey. The global demand still serves as the key factor for the adaptation of higher education systems around the world, including Turkey. The rapid expansion of Turkey's universities comes with dubious issues of the quality of education and homogeneity within Turkey's higher education system. The findings revealed that the new Turkey universities are not doing well in terms of quality. The policy on encouraging the research development is required. The bureaucratic model seems to be the most prevalent model for Turkish higher education. This model is well-known for its regulations, rational goals, and functionality of their administrative roles and processes. The Council of Higher Education in Turkey has served as the key

agent of coercive force in making Turkish higher education more centralised, bureaucratic, and isomorphic.

Interesting studies in the area of higher education which can be applied to the framework of this research is the work of Joo and Halx (2012). These researchers analysed the isomorphism process among Korean national universities toward the institutionalisation of performance-based pay systems. The three isomorphic pressures were explicitly displayed in the operation of Korean national universities and close associations with one another. Coercive isomorphism, the most obvious mechanism, strongly relates to the historical and social contexts. The historical contexts also reflect the mimetic process in Korean universities. The findings revealed the US university model still has a strong influence on the Korean government. The US model and management skills have been imitated by the Korean government and its HEIs since the tenure of US military presence in Korea. Normative pressure is considered when the PPS serves as the essential norm for university management. This research model provides the insight into understanding the isomorphic process in the public and private universities through considering society and its institutions. It also suggests the relationship between the multiple organisational and institutional developments that affect the implementation of new phenomenon.

The work of Caravella (2011) is also considered as the guideline in providing the possible sources of the three isomorphic pressures in this research. Caravella (2011) was interested in the influence of the three isomorphic pressures in the institutionalisation of distance learning in the United States. The research findings expressed that the three isomorphic pressures are embedded in the institutionalisation of distance learning. The coercive pressures have been developed through the forms of laws, regulations, and accreditation of superior organisations or external organisations. Normative values in this research are developed from professional values and on-the-job socialisation. In the meantime, in order to respond to the uncertainty, mimetic forces are associated with many sources (i.e., standardised programmes, best practices, or common organisation structure). Research findings expressed that the surrounding environment of distance learning plays a significant role in the homogeneity of distance learning.

The research of Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) on the institutional isomorphism and public sector organisation is also applied to the framework for this research. The work of Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) used isomorphic pressure to explain the difference in the level of conformity towards the institutional pressures of the three types of organisation: government agencies, non-profit organisations, and for-profit organisations. The research findings revealed that the response to the institutional pressure of the three types of organisations are different. The government agencies and non-profit organisations are more vulnerable to the institutional pressures, while the for-profit organisations seem to show less conformity toward the pressure. There is no significant difference between government organisations and non-profit organisations. The reason to support the weaker institutional pressures in for-profit organisations is the owner. The owner of for-profit organisations have direct influence and control and monitor the performance and budget expenditure of these organisations for maximum benefits. In the meantime, the government and non-profit organisations do not have to respond to any performance indicators. The researchers suggested that the government roles as principal funder and regulatory agencies support the vulnerability of public sector organisations toward the institutional pressures.

When the institutions are recognised as open systems impacted by their environment (Scott, 1987), the institutional change can be caused by both internal and external pressures and factors. The way universities responded to these challenges are broadly explained as convergence and divergence (Vaira, 2004). The former label refers to the homogenisation process while the latter label expresses the difference of each institution. In the context of Thai higher education, the implementation of ASEAN MRA-TP, as the external pressure, is considered the key factor for analysing the institutional change in Thai HEIs. The pressure might bring about interesting issues which have strongly affected Thai HEIs. The voluntary status in implementing ASEAN MRA-TP and the roles of government in pushing ASEAN MRA-TP into practice is one of the important factors for the operations of Thai HEIs. Moreover, the general assumption of society toward the role of Thai HEIs as the main agent in producing the manpower to support the high demand of the labour market seems to be another pressure for the decision of Thai HEIs in responding to ASEAN MRA-TP.

In terms of internal pressure, the difference in the HEIs' governance and administration seems to be an important source of pressure in shaping the operation of Thai HEIs toward ASEAN MRA-TP. The autonomy in formulating their own policies and strategies as well as the different support from the government in terms of budget allocation is necessary for researchers to consider, as these factors will indicate the direction of universities' activities in supporting ASEAN MRA-TP. The existing university policy, i.e. the policies related to the internationalisation in higher education and the historical background of Thai HEIs, serves as the factor for the institutional change in Thai HEIs.

3.4 Chapter summary

As this research intends to understand the operation of Thai HEIs toward the implementation of ASEAN MRA-TP, this research then focuses on the isomorphism change model in the new institutionalism theory. This change model can be a useful framework in exploring the institutional change in Thai HEIs toward the implementation of ASEAN MRA-TP. Studying the way of change in Thai HEIs toward the external and internal pressures exerted from the implementation of ASEAN MRA-TP is necessary for understanding the behaviours and operations of Thai HEIs in response to ASEAN MRA-TP. The literature on ASEAN and regionalism can provide insightful information on the foundation of ASEAN and the development of ASEAN norms. This information associates with the action of each ASEAN member country towards ASEAN MRA-TP and the ASEAN MRA-TP principles. The information on internationalisation and regionalisation of higher education can shape the ideas on what Thai HEIs are doing in the international aspect, which serves as the solid foundation of any activities in responding to ASEAN MRA-TP. The next chapter will outline the research questions and methodology underpinning this research.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

The previous chapter reviewed the literature related to the formation of ASEAN and the adaptation of higher education institutions in response to their changing environments to provide a better understanding of the contexts and background of this study. That literature review also guides the research methodology that will be followed in this paper, which is explained in this chapter. This chapter will outline the research design and methodology employed in this study. It starts by underpinning the research context and problem, together with the research purposes and questions, while it then discusses the philosophical stance and concept of the research methodology to explain why the chosen research methodology was adopted. The overall picture of the research design, including the case study selection, is then explained, followed by the data collection process. This chapter will also describe the document research and interviews to illustrate how the empirical data were obtained, and outline the how the data are analysed. Issues pertaining to validity, reliability, limitation, and ethical considerations are also addressed, and finally, the research methodology employed in this research will be summarised.

4.1 Research Background and Problems

Since the Bangkok Declaration, which addressed the formation of the ASEAN community, was signed in 1967, all member states have accepted a responsibility to build the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region; this includes Thailand, a founding member. From loose co-operation to dynamic regional co-operation, the ASEAN member countries have come to learn to develop trust and confidence in each other, and have built up the community via co-operation in three interlocking pillars: the APSC, the AEC, and the ASCC. These three communities encompass many activities that all promote the success of ASEAN integration. However, the AEC seems to be the most progressive, and has explicitly affected the well-being of the community as a whole.

The AEC has been considered an optimal way to promote economic co-operation between the 10 ASEAN member countries, aiming to create a single market and production base with a free flow of goods, investments, capital, services, and skilled labour between all countries. Of the many projects and activities involved in boosting

this economic integration, the key initiative is the development of the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) in eight professional areas: architectural services, surveying, medical practitioners, dental practitioners, engineering services, nursing, accounting services, and tourism professionals. Except in the area of tourism, the MRAs have made good progress because they have a clear direction and procedure for their development for these jobs, requiring a professional certificate and licence for people to work. At the same time, the MRAs for tourism professionals are different because they can apply to all workers in the market who meet the MRAs' requirements and standards. Moreover, the free movement of professionals working in the tourism sector has had a vast impact in Thailand, where tourism services are one of the main pillars of the Thai economy.

Under the ASEAN MRA-TP, common competency standards and a common tourism curriculum are being developed as standardised tools for ASEAN tourism professionals; all tourism professionals who intend to work in other ASEAN countries are obliged to earn the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate to prove that they meet the requirements designated by the ASEAN MRA-TP committee. The Thai government is aware of its impact and has asked all stakeholders, including the higher education sector, to prepare for the upcoming changes associated with the MRA-TP. The main challenge here is for the higher education sector to produce qualified tourism and hospitality graduates who can compete in a highly competitive labour market and meet the requirements of the ASEAN MRA-TP. This being so, the ASEAN MRA-TP seems to be the factor that will most quickly bring about change in Thai universities, and any operations launched in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP need to be prepared and considered.

The general aim of this research is to study how Thai HEIs have responded to the upcoming ASEAN integration, especially in relation to changes associated with the creation of a free flow of professional and skilled labour under the ASEAN MRA-TP. It also intends to explore the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP in terms of the operations of Thai HEIs, in addition to the views and perspectives of Thai HEIs. The changes in the roles and operations of Thai HEIs also investigate. Given the different types of governance in Thai HEIs, it is necessary to investigate how to interpret and apply government policy in light of the ASEAN MRA-TP, based on the various types of Thai HEI. The main research question of this thesis is formed as follows:

- **How Thai HEIs change in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP?**

To answer this main question, several subordinate research questions must be considered:

- **What factors affect the operation of Thai HEIs in response to ASEAN MRA-TP?**

This research intends to describe the preparations and operations of Thai HEIs in the face of the new challenges presented by the ASEAN MRA-TP, the more competitive labour market, and the new standards of competency required for tourism professionals. To this end, this paper will examine the external and internal factors related to ASEAN MRA-TP, as well as the views and perceptions of stakeholders in Thai HEIs, to effectively showcase the new approach taken by Thai HEIs.

- **What is the role of government in the context of Thai HEIs responding to ASEAN MRA-TP?**

The ASEAN MRA-TP agreement was designed to bring into being a common competency standard for tourism professionals in the ASEAN region. All ASEAN member countries are required to prepare themselves for coping with this challenge. The implementation of this agreement, as well as its procedures and regulations, has been cascaded from the regional to the national level. The performance of the government is thus important for the operations of Thai HEIs. The directions and policies the government has undertaken in the ASEAN MRA-TP context are expected to act as a guideline for Thai HEIs' plans. Other government activities are also required in order to facilitate the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. This research will explore the role of the government in supporting the work of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP.

- **What variations, if any, have HEIs with different types of governance experienced in their response to the ASEAN MRA-TP?**

The operations of each type of Thai HEI are taken into account to showcase the whole picture of the operations of Thai HEIs. Different types of Thai HEIs have different internal management and government support; each type of university has its own process of policy formulation and curriculum development, which affect how they respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

To answer the research question, it is first necessary to identify the methods used to collect data collection to gather all relevant and useful information. Table 5 shows the

correlation between the data collection method and the important issues that will be explored in this research.

Important issues	Data collection method
Response to the challenges and opportunities presented by ASEAN MRA-TP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of ASEAN and Regionalism • A literature review of internationalisation and higher education regionalisation • Government policy documents • Documentation from Thai HEIs • Interviews
Factors affecting the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of Thai education • A literature review of ASEAN and Regionalism • A literature review of Institutional Isomorphism • Documentation related to the ASEAN MRA-TP • Government policy documents • Documentation from Thai HEIs • Interviews
Different types of governance in Thai HEIs that influence the response to the ASEAN MRA-TP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of Thai education • Documentation from Thai HEIs • Interviews
The role of the government sector in supporting Thai HEIs to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of ASEAN and Regionalism • A literature review of Thai education • Government policy documents • Interviews
The changes in Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A literature review of institutional Isomorphism • Documentation from Thai HEIs • Interviews

Table 5: Method of data collection to be used in this research

In Table 5, it is seen that this research data is mainly obtained from interviews. This information allows the researcher to identify the research approach suitable for this research. As an interview is a research technique that involves non-numerical data, it is most often used to collect qualitative data (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Moreover, this table also provides the guideline for the philosophical perspective and research approach used in this research.

4.2 Philosophical perspectives

The decision on the methodology to be adopted for a piece of academic research has to address the philosophical assumptions about the influences on the research, and which research method is most suitable; also relevant here is the research paradigm that guides the direction of the research. According to Kuhn (1967, p.45), the research paradigm is the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed. The research paradigm guides the structure and framework of the research, as well as its values and assumptions (Olsen et al., 1992). Guba and Lincoln (1998) have written that a research paradigm is related to the concepts of ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (how reality is known), and methodology (the method used to investigate reality). These three elements help the researcher to come to a better understanding of the strategies, method, and analysis used in any given study.

In academic research, the research philosophy usually takes the form of either positivism or interpretivism (Bryman, 2011). In the positivist paradigm, reality is objective and determined by cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell, 2003). Meanwhile, interpretivism considers reality to be socially constructed based on people's experiences (Mutch, 2005). Supporting Mutch's view, Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Guba and Lincoln (1994), and Creswell (2003) claimed that the world is constructed and interpreted by applying the behaviour and experiences of people who the researcher comes into contact with in the research setting. Researchers in this paradigm are naturalistic because they tend to understand phenomena in the real world in a given time period and do not generalise other phenomena, which is what is done in qualitative research methodology.

The paradigm underpinning this research is constructivism/interpretivist because it focuses on exploration and theory generation, using the behaviour and actions of humans to understand and interpret phenomena in a social setting (Usher, 1996 p.18). This is supported by the notion of Cohen, Manion and Marrison (2011) that 'actions are only meaningful to us in so far as we are able to ascertain the intentions of actors to share their experiences' (p.17). Interpretivism involves exploring the world through the experiences and perceptions of individuals. It also encourages the researcher to understand the research phenomenon by interpreting the understanding of research

participants. From this point of view, the interpretive paradigm supports my research as this research intends to explore how Thai HEIs construct the meaning of their experiences and perceptions towards the ASEAN MRA-TP as well as the decision to formulate policies and initiate academic activities. The research participants play a vital role in constructing reality based on their actions and experiences with regard to the phenomenon.

According to Willis (2007), interpretivists seek to understand a particular context. They believe an understanding of the context in which any form of research is conducted is critical to the interpretation of data gathered (p. 4). Interpretivism is therefore a method of interpreting reality that is open to multiple perspectives of different individuals from different groups. The in-depth information from individuals is thus more significant for interpretivists than the statistical data. These statements can support the idea of this research when investigating a phenomenon in the group of Thai HEI staff in different positions from different HEIs. Gathering research data from multiple sources can provide insightful information, which can lead to a better understanding of the reality in the research setting. Stake (1995) also supports the philosophical stance of this research, stressing the role of the researcher to gather and interpret social reality. In this research, the researcher also led the way in collecting the data and interpreting the meaning of reality in the setting, and these characteristics reflect the constructivist/interpretivist stance.

The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm often uses a qualitative method (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Silverman, 2000; Willis 2007). The qualitative method can provide rich information for interpretivist researchers with which to interpret and understand the phenomenon (Willis, 2007). Most contemporary qualitative researchers follow the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction (Stake, 1995 p.99). In-depth information gathered from the individuals is significant for the interpretivism paradigm. Therefore, describing the world using numerical data and accurate measurements through a quantitative method is not the preferred mode of interpretivism. A qualitative approach is instead more suitable for this study, which intends to explore how the experiences and perceptions of staff in Thai HEIs influence how they respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

4.3 Research Approach

The choice of research approach plays a vital part in achieving the research goals and objectives of any study, governing the general research direction, while it also yields the research plan and procedure for data collection and analysis. Creswell (2009) has suggested that the decision of which research approach to follow is based on many components including the worldview assumptions of the researcher, the specific methods chosen for data collection and analysis, and the research problems and questions.

When the aim of this research is to explore how Thai HEIs have responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP, the qualitative approach was selected as the most suitable choice. In general, qualitative research is designed for discovering the experiences of people in the particular setting of the problems in question (Stake, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Qualitative research is intended to provide a better understanding of the problems in social contexts (Jones, Torres and Arminio, 2006), and to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009 p.4). Moreover, qualitative research is suitable for research that studies the circumstances in a natural setting, and interpret phenomena from the perspective of participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) that could be hard to extract using the other research method (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). It is also useful in understanding social processes in context, and seeking the meaning of social phenomena (Esterberg, 2002).

The characteristics of qualitative research have been described by many researchers (e.g. Bogden and Biklen, 1992; Hatch, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Punch, 2009). The common characteristics of qualitative research they suggested are that it collects research data in a natural setting, focuses on participants' meaning and experiences, and uses inductive data analysis and the researcher as key instruments. Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning of social phenomena through the views and experiences of the research participants, and the researcher plays a vital role in this type of research. The researcher has to work in the natural setting of the research and collect the data through direct communication such as by examining documents, observing behaviour, or conducting interviews; Information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009, p.175). After conducting

their research fieldwork, qualitative researchers then organise and categorise the data gathered into themes through the inductive approach. The data are interpreted based on what the researcher sees, hears, and understands (Creswell, 2009, p.176).

Through these characteristics, the qualitative approach is likely the best-suited method. This research intends to understand the phenomenon of Thai HEIs preparing themselves for coping with the challenge of the ASEAN MRA-TP. It also requires in-depth information from the stakeholders of Thai HEIs regarding the performance of Thai HEIs. Therefore, non-numerical data is gathered from many sources, i.e. Thai HEIs' strategic plans, policy documents, and the perspectives and experiences of Thai HEI staff, which is necessary for this research in order to interpret this phenomenon. The participation of the researcher in the fieldwork is also important for this research. The researcher is required to play a leading role in gathering the research data from the stakeholder as well as analyse and interpret the research data to examine the real experience of Thai HEI staff in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

4.4 Research Method

Given the characteristics outlined above, the qualitative approach is deemed the most appropriate research design for this study, which deals with 'how' and 'what' questions; Creswell (1998) states that qualitative research questions often relate to 'how' and 'what' questions. These kinds of questions help to yield in-depth information on the issue in consideration in the research (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998), and are different to the 'why' questions of quantitative research (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). According to Creswell (1997, 2002), the aim of qualitative research is to explore a research topic when theories are insufficient to explain the actions of the research participants. The purpose of this research is to explore how Thai HEIs have responded to the upcoming ASEAN integration, especially in relation to the changes associated with the creation of a free flow of tourism professionals under the ASEAN MRA-TP. The reality extracted from the perceptions and experiences of the research participants is key to understanding the phenomenon. Many factors in this research such as the participants' awareness of the ASEAN MRA-TP and the governance of different types of Thai HEIs are unique and hard to identify in a quantitative form; the researcher is therefore required to spend time in the field, and analyse the data in text form (Creswell, 1997). Lastly, a key concern of this research is to understand

stakeholders' views of the meanings underlying the operations of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP; these stakeholders are both HEI management and academic staff, as well as the government sector. This is supported by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), who state that 'Researchers who use this approach are interested in the ways different people make sense out of their lives' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992 p.32).

Bryman (2001) has also outlined the process of qualitative research (see Figure 6), which is begun by identifying the research questions and aims (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2003). In the next stage, the researcher needs to choose the research setting and subjects, which includes literature review and methodology. Here, it is necessary to 'purposefully select participants or sites' because they can provide a better understanding of the research problem and question (Creswell, 2009, p.178). The following step is data collection; a qualitative researcher spends a significant amount of time in the field, gathering the research data using four basic procedures: observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2009, p.179). After collecting the data, the researcher can then interpret them. In this stage, the researcher might decide that the research question requires more specific data, and then spend additional time in the field to obtain further information. The final stage of qualitative research is reporting the research data. The results of the research may be presented in the narrative form of a person's life or experiences, the theory obtained from the data, the culture of a certain group of people, or in-depth information about particular cases (Creswell, 2009, p.193).

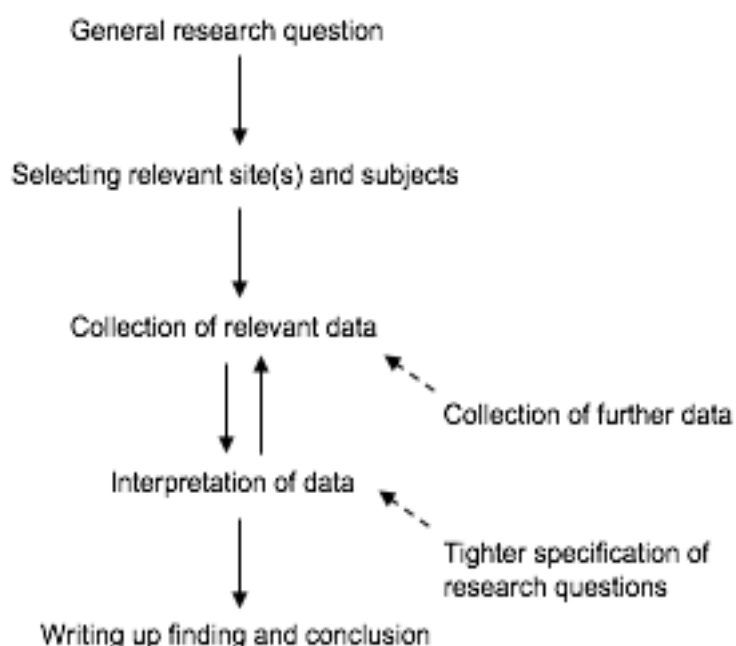


Figure 5: The process of conducting qualitative research

(Source: Bryman, 2001, p.267)

Creswell (1997) has identified five types of qualitative research approaches: biographical, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case studies (see Table 6). Each research design has differences in focus, discipline origin, data collection process, data analysis, and narrative form, as seen in Table 6.

The process outlined above was applied when designing this research. The researcher started by identifying the area of interest – the ASEAN MRA-TP – and developing the research questions. Thai HEIs were chosen as the research setting, and Thai HEI staff and other stakeholders related to the ASEAN MRA-TP were the research participants. These representatives can provide insightful information related to the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP as well as the policy and plan formulated for the ASEAN MRA-TP at both the national and institutional level. The researcher is the key person for data collection and data analysis. After analysing the data, a report of the research will be developed by the researcher to explain the research phenomenon.

4.5 Case study and participant selection

Based on the characteristic of this research, the case study method seems the most appropriate method for this research. A case study is ‘an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information in rich contexts’ (Creswell, 1998, p.6). The ‘bounded system’ is constrained by the place and time and the case being studied, while the researcher is able to understand the overall characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003, p.2). Moreover, case studies are typically used in a research study when the research questions take the form of ‘how’ or ‘why’ in a contemporary context, and the researcher has little control over events (Yin, 2003, p.9). These kinds of research questions tend to be more explanatory when they relate to data collected over a period of time, instead of frequencies; these cases can be compared when they are described in a similar way.

There are also a number of limitations to the case study research design, such as the fact that the researcher has little or no control over the research. However, this special characteristic can be helpful for researchers who intends to study a phenomenon in a certain research context (Yin, 2003, p.13). More inferences that take place in the small sample of a case study can lead to the risk of an indeterminate research design, therefore case study researchers are required to make as many observations as possible to eliminate that risk. Lastly, when conducting case study research, it can be difficult to select representatives for the case, especially in single-case studies. One possible solution is for comparative case study research, based on appropriate and sufficient case selection.

After considering the issues described above, the researcher concluded that the case study research method will best support her intention in this study to explore the effects of the ASEAN MRA-TP on the operations of Thai HEIs. Because this research is intended to provide better understanding of how Thai HEIs have been changed by the ASEAN MRA-TP, their response to it, and to study the various strategies of different types of Thai HEIs, each participating Thai HEI is considered a case and one unit of analysis; this information will be gathered using multiple sources, such as interviews, documents, and reports. The boundaries of each HEI in the Thai higher education context are clearly established, and a comparative, multiple-case-study design is applied in this research, with a ‘focus is both within and across the cases’ (Punch, 2009). Three universities are used as cases for this research because each has its own clear characteristics and boundaries.

It is important for a case study researcher to carefully consider and select representative cases to ensure the validity and reliability of the study (Seidman, 1998). Purposeful sampling has been used to identify the cases in this research. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling is widely applied in qualitative research to select the most information-rich cases in the context of limited resources, while it is also used to identify suitable participants with knowledge and experience of the phenomenon in question (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

After considering the characteristics of Thai HEIs, the researcher decided to apply stratified purposive sampling techniques (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) to select the universities to be used as case studies. As a part of this technique, a subgroup of the population will be identified and a sample selected from each subgroup in a purposive manner; this is also described as 'selecting samples within samples' (Patton, 2002). Thai HEIs that fall under the provision of the OHEC in Thailand (excluding colleges and community colleges) which offer tourism and hospitality programmes are all affected by the ASEAN MRA-TP, 84 Thai HEIs, and thus are all potential participants in this research. According to Table 3 in Chapter 2, Thai HEIs can be classified into three groups and four groups based on the type of university governance and the role of Thai HEIs, respectively. These two methods of classification can be useful for the researcher when classifying the subgroup of Thai HEIs for the case study selection. As this research also concerns the difference ways university governance directly affects the performance of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP, 84 Thai HEIs that offer tourism and hospitality programmes were categorised into three groups, based on the type of university governance whether they are autonomous, public or private universities. One university for each group was selected for the case study analysis. This was done to take into account different styles of operation and the process of policy formulation and implementation in each type of university. It also clarifies the importance of governance support, including budget allocation and policy transfer, for the operations of the universities. The 84 Thai HEIs that offer tourism and hospitality programmes were then divided into 12 autonomous universities, 51 public universities, and 21 private universities.

The researcher is still considering the grouping of Thai HEIs based on their role as their position in the Thai higher education market can reflect their direction and performance when it comes to supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP. However, according to the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Thai Higher Education (2008-2022), each university has the

right to identify to which group they want to belong: research university, science and technology/ specialised university, comprehensive university, or community college. Therefore, this information is considered again after classifying by the type of university governance.

The number of tourism and hospitality students enrolled was used as the main criterion to identify which universities should be considered representative for each group of Thai universities. The researcher concluded that the level of awareness of the ASEAN MRA-TP and preparation thereof among Thai HEIs will be higher when it affects a majority of tourism and hospitality students, and therefore the universities with the highest number of students enrolled in tourism and hospitality programmes for each type of HEI was selected for inclusion in the case study. The number of tourism and hospitality programmes offered by the university are considered another criterion. The universities that offer tourism and hospitality programmes at different levels of study clearly show the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on the operations of Thai HEIs, in that the ASEAN MRA-TP affects common tourism curriculums and the competency standards required for ASEAN tourism workers at all educational levels, starting from basic diplomas to doctoral degree. Finally, three Thai universities – termed here Universities A, B, and C – have been selected as the case study for this research.

University A represents an autonomous university. This university has a long reputation for academic excellence in the sciences, especially agricultural education. With its reputation and its expertise in scientific research, this university was nominated by the government to be one of the research universities of Thailand. Therefore, this university also falls into the group of ‘research university’, categorised by its role. Not only does this university excel in the sciences, it focuses on social science programmes. This university’s tourism and hospitality programmes are very well-known because they were the first undergraduate programmes in tourism and hospitality in Thailand.

University B represents a public university. This university was established by the government with the intention of expanding higher education to rural areas. In the beginning, this university focused on teacher training and has since developed into a comprehensive university. This university stressed the importance of tourism and hospitality programmes by upgrading the programme’s faculty. This also led to a large number of students enrolled in this university.

The last university in this research, University C, is a private university. This university specialises in tourism and hospitality. All programmes offered by this university are related to work in the tourism industry. Therefore, the tourism and hospitality programmes of this university were designed to focus more on skills training. Thus, this university has an excellent reputation for producing high-quality skilled labour in the tourism industry. Moreover, this university has a strong relationship with Thai hotel chains, which can support their students by allowing them to gain real-life experience using their skills.

Characteristics	University A	University B	University C
General Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment year • Size • No. of campus • No. of programmes • No. of staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic staff • Supporting staff • No. of student (all) • Research output • Type of university (based on OHEC) 	1943 Large (20.79 km ²) 4 588 More than 3,000 More than 6,000 More than 70,000 High Research University	1994 Medium (2.08 km ²) 2 160 More than 1,000 More than 3,000 More than 35,000 Medium Comprehensive U.	1993 Small 2 10 More than 50 More than 100 More than 3,000 Medium Specialised University
University Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status • Financial support • Academic Administration • Personnel Administration • Financial Administration 	Autonomous Partial support from Gov. Autonomy Autonomy Autonomy	Public Fully support from Gov. Autonomy Partial Autonomy Gov. regulated	Private Own revenue Autonomy Autonomy Autonomy
Tourism and Hospitality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status • Establishment year • No. of programmes • No. of academic staff • No. of student 	Department 1981 7 More than 30 More than 3,000	Faculty 2001 4 More than 30 More than 3,000	Faculty 1993 10 More than 50 More than 3,000

Table 6: The main characteristics of the case study in the research

A purposeful selection strategy was used to identify the participants for the interviews to be conducted in the course of this research. Maxwell (2005) has suggested that this

is 'a selection strategy in which particular setting, persons or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices' (p.88).

The selection criteria were based on working positions and experiences among management and teaching staff; managerial and faculty staff at each university were purposefully selected for the interviews because they can provide information about the current situation of each university in terms of its response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Staff at the managerial level can provide an overview of the policy and plan formulation and government engagement in response to the impacts of the ASEAN MRA-TP; their views of the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP reveal the direction and operation of the university, which can be cross-checked with the information gained from the faculty staff. The faculty staff are also key persons in that they can provide an idea of what universities are doing in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP, and the policies that universities have implemented in their tourism and hospitality programmes.

In Thailand, it is customary to send official letters directly to HEIs to ask for permission to conduct research. Because the researcher is a government official who works for the OHEC, an official letter signed by the Secretary-General of the OHEC was sent to the president of each university that was selected to serve as a case study to ask permission to conduct a number of interviews. This letter detailed all relevant information about the purpose of the interviews, and the characteristics of the preferred interviewees for this research, together with the research abstract, information about the researcher, the interview questions, and a consent form. After receiving the list of participants and their contact details, the researcher then contacted all participants individually to make an interview appointment. Moreover, government officials whose work relates to the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand and higher education policymakers were interviewed to gain an overall picture of the research background, leading to a total of 30 participants to be interviewed. The list of interviewees is shown in Table 7.

Code Name	Gender	Position	Years of Experiences	Degree	Participating in ASEAN MRA-TP activities
University A					
Interviewees AM1	M	Management	>13	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AM2	M	Management	>18	Master	Curriculum
Interviewees AS1	F	Lecturer	>25	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AS2	F	Lecturer	>7	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AS3	F	Lecturer	>18	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AS4	F	Lecturer	>12	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
University B					
Interviewee BM1	M	Management	>10	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee BM2	F	Management	>7	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BM3	M	Management	>7	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BS1	F	Lecturer	>8	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BS2	F	Lecturer	>6	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee BS3	F	Lecturer	>10	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BS4	M	Lecturer	>6	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee BS5	F	Lecturer	>10	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee BS6	M	Lecturer	>6	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee BS7	M	Lecturer	>12	Master	Curriculum
University C					
Interviewee CM1	M	Management	>17	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee CM2	M	Management	>12	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CM3	M	Management	>15	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CM4	F	Management	>10	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee CS1	F	Lecturer	>10	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee CS2	F	Lecturer	>7	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CS3	F	Lecturer	>18	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee CS4	M	Lecturer	>6	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CS5	M	Lecturer	>23	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee CS6	F	Lecturer	>5	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CS7	M	Lecturer	>15	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Other					
Interviewee D1	M	Policy analyst	>15	Master	HE Policy and Strategy
Interviewee D2	F	Education Officer	>20	Ph.D.	HE Standards
Interviewee D3	F	Gov. Officer	>15	Master	All Issues related to ASEAN MRA-TP

Table 7: The list of interviewees

4.6 Data Collection

As stated previously, the qualitative approach has been deemed the most appropriate design for this research in terms of the required data, and details and explanations of how, what, and why the phenomenon occurs and the participants act in response. Yin (2002) has written that data for case study-based research can be collected from multiple sources, while it is also important to engage in data triangulation to increase the accuracy of the research data and ensures its reliability (Yin, 2002; Stake, 2000). This being so, documentation and interviews were selected as the sources of evidence for this research.

Some documentation has been analysed in this paper to gather background information and create a framework to understand the background of this research. According to Yin (2002), there are many forms of documentation that are appropriate when gathering data, such as administrative documents, newspaper, memoranda, and minutes of meetings. Document research entails the analysis of documents related to the area of study (Mogalakwe, 2006), and encompasses the techniques used to categorise, investigate, interpret and identify the limitations of physical sources, most commonly written documents, whether in the private or public domain (Payne and Payne, 2004). The most significant benefit of documentation is that it consists of strong evidence for other sources of data; it is a stable and referable source that supports the accuracy of research data. However, possible drawbacks are bias in document selection and inaccurate data contained in documents. According to Punch (2009), data from documents can be used in conjunction with interviews. For this research, documentation serves as a secondary data source to support the evidence in this research, and allow for the triangulation of the points of interest that emerge during the interviews.

The documents used in this research cover the ASEAN MRA-TP framework, principles, and the Thai higher education context. As mentioned previously, some documents are used to provide a better understanding of the current situation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand and the Thai higher education context such as official documents about the ASEAN MRA-TP of the MOTS, handbooks about the AEC and the ASEAN MRA-TP meeting agenda, as well as Thai education policies, the Second 15-year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008-2022), and the Eleventh Higher Education

Development Plan (2012-2016). Some of these documents are openly available to the public through the website of government bodies such as the OHEC, the MOE, and the MOTS. Other documents could be found in publicly accessible books, or in government-published publications. These documents contain crucial information to assist the researcher in framing the research direction, and establishing the correct interview questions.

During the period in which the interviews are conducted, it is important for the researcher to establish the most relevant documents to support the accuracy of the data gained in the interviews. Many official documents published by the case study universities are available, and university policies and strategies, the outline of the tourism and hospitality programme in each case study, the tourism and hospitality curriculum framework reported to the OHEC of each case study, and other meeting memorandum and agenda were searched for and used for triangulation. These documents yielded insightful information on both the external and internal environments of Thai HEIs, related to the changes that have taken place based on the ASEAN MRA-TP.

In addition to documentation, the interview method has been employed in this research as the main instrument for data collection. Interviewing is considered the foundation for data collection in many qualitative research designs, and especially in case study research; 'Interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meaning in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding and clarifying and elaborating their own perspectives on their lived world' (Kvale, 1996, p.105). An interview is a conversation between two persons – the interviewer and interviewees – who respectively ask and answer specific questions (Esterberg, 2002). An interview is different to an everyday conversation because it has a specific purpose and is question-based; 'Interviews enable participants ... to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.267). The research interview is a 'two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purposes of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation' (Cannell and Kahn, 1968, cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). However, researchers who choose this method for data collection need to be aware of its disadvantages such as poor interview questions, a response bias, and a bias reflexivity among interviewees.

Patton (1980) has written that interviewing is done to canvass people's views and perspectives on a specific topic about which the researcher wishes to find out more, and therefore the interview questions and type of interview play a vital role in leading the discussion for gathering suitable data. Being the key player, the researcher needs to understand the need for active listening, non-judgemental behaviour, and clear questions before starting the interview sessions. Patton (1990) has suggested six types of information that interview questions seek to gather: experiences/behaviour, opinions/beliefs, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic information. This is very useful for the researcher, when designing the questions for this research. The questions were divided into five sets, based on the positions and responsibilities of the interviewees; academic and management staff at universities, policymakers who decide on Thai higher education policies, and government officials who have worked on the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. These interview questions covered four key themes that address the impacts and factors affecting the operation of Thai HEIs. These key themes are:

- The preparation of Thai HEIs in responding to ASEAN MRA-TP
- ASEAN MRA-TP awareness: importance, principles and benefits
- University governance and its management
- The engagement of the government sector in supporting Thai HEIs to respond to ASEAN MRA-TP

From these key themes, a number of important issues emerge that can be used to guide the formulation of the interview questions. These issues then help the researcher to ensure that the interview questions cover all the important information required to answer the research questions (See Table 8)

Issue to address	Objectives
Interviewees information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work experiences • Responsibilities/scope of work • Education • Years spent working in the current position • Past experiences • Working related to the ASEAN MRA-TP • Knowledge of the ASEAN MRA-TP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gather interpersonal data of the interviewees • To understand their background, views and experiences related to the ASEAN MRA-TP
Preparation of university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gather information about the university

Issue to address	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New/current academic activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP • Internal changes • University policies and plans • Roles of the university related to the ASEAN MRA-TP • Future plans • Curriculum development • Language training and preparation • Facility development • Staff development/research • Academic networking • Employment opportunities • Curriculum alignment with the ASEAN MRA-TP standards • External/internal pressure • Expectation: graduates, government, industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore current activities of the university in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP • To understand the stand point and views of the university via its operational staff in supporting or working related to the ASEAN MRA-TP
<p>Awareness of the ASEAN MRA-TP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance • Principles • Benefits/opportunities • Impact factors • Challenges • Limitations • Expectation/goals • Common standards/curriculum • Free flow of labour/larger labour market • Loose co-operation within ASEAN • Advantages and disadvantages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore the interviewees' background knowledge of the ASEAN MRA-TP • To understand the level of awareness and importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the view of the university • To determine the key factors of the ASEAN MRA-TP related to the operations of the university
<p>University governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget allocation from the government • Financial/resources management • Organisational structure • Internal management • Bottom-up/top-down management • Decision-making process • Bureaucracy • Objectives/goals of the university • Future direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the influence of the type of university governance towards the operations of the university • To explore the internal management of the university to understand how it supports activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP

Issue to address	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advantages and disadvantages of the type of governance 	
Government engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government policies and plans for the ASEAN MRA-TP Budget support Government project Tools/measures used to support the ASEAN MRA-TP Co-operation at the national and international levels Quality Assurance Frameworks Expectations towards the university Current projects/activities Type of university support expected/accepted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explore the government policies and plans related to the ASEAN MRA-TP To understand the role of government in supporting the operations of the universities To explore the expectations of the government towards the operations of the university with regards to the ASEAN MRA-TP

Table 8: Important issues and their objectives

Based on Patton (2015), a standardised open-ended interview approach has been applied for this research, which requires the open-ended questions to be established before the interview sessions begin. The wording of these questions needs to be carefully designed, while they need to be in an open-ended format. The interviewees will be asked the same set of questions in the same order to avoid the possibility of bias in the data, and increase the comparability of the responses. Based on this approach, the researcher outlined and designed the interview questions in advance. There are approximately 13 interview questions in each set, grouped into the four themes mentioned previously. Moreover, the nature of the open-ended interview questions allows the interviewer to encourage the participants to openly respond to the questions. The interviewees also played their role by responding and clarifying any points made during the interviews.

As has been discussed above, it is necessary for the researcher to send official letters directly to the head of each university, asking for permission to interview and identify the interviewees. These letters clarified the purpose of the research, and the characteristics of desired participants. The participants were then assigned by the head of the university. After receiving the name and contact details of interviewees, the

researcher contacted the participants individually to make an interview appointment. The interview questions and consent form were directly sent to each interviewee via e-mail after agreeing on an interview time and date. The interview sessions occurred between April and July 2016, and all took place in the interviewees' offices. All interviews were conducted face to face in the Thai language, and each lasted around one to two hours. The researcher also asked for interviewees' permission to record the interviews, making it clear that the recordings could be paused at any time, if the interviewees wished.

At the beginning of each interview session, the researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of this study, the research procedure, and the expected benefits in order to build up trust and a relaxed atmosphere. The researcher also reminded the interviewees of their right to withdraw from this study at any time, and that their data would be protected. During the interviews, a structured sequence of the questions was outlined in the form of an interview guide. Because this research involves multiple case studies, an interview guide can be a valuable tool for the researcher to ensure cross-case comparability. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow for new ideas to emerge during the interview period; this is suitable for this study because it helps in exploring the opinions of interviewees about complex or sensitive issues, and clarifying the interviewees' answers.

The researcher faced some challenges when conducting the interviews. The major challenge concerned the availability of the interviewees, and the difficulties in arranging the interviews. After receiving the name and contact details of all interviewees, the researcher called each one directly to ask for an available time and date. Sometimes, however, the researcher was asked to postpone the meeting as little as one hour before the session, and was asked to rearrange the sessions on many occasions, and the researcher was also interrupted in some sessions, when the interviewees were called for urgent meetings, making it necessary to arrange new sessions. Another complicating factor was the location of some interviewees' offices. The researcher arranged time slots for interviews, and had to be especially careful when arranging slots for interviewees in rural locations. Unfortunately, some interviewees asked to postpone the interviews at inconvenient times for the researcher.

Yet another challenge was maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees' data. Interviewees sometimes felt nervous when explaining their answers

in detail, or providing their real feeling when discussing some issues, making it necessary for the researcher to build trust and confidence. The researcher encouraged a relaxed atmosphere during the interviews, and even changing some wording in the questions to reduce tension, and keep a smooth flow in the interview session. Sometimes, the researcher rearranged the sequence of questions to focus on the information being given at any given time, while the researcher also asked some questions not on the original list to obtain more information from the interviewees. Some of these questions did not directly relate to the interview questions, but helped to provide an overview of the interviewees' views and intentions towards the issues at hand.

As mentioned previously, all interviews were conducted in Thai, and the researcher then translated them into English. All interview data were recorded using an audio recorder, and the interviewees were asked for permission to make a recording, before starting the interviews. Apart from the audio recording, which was the main tool used to ensure the accuracy of the interview data, the researcher took notes during the interviews, as a secondary tool to better enable transcriptions. The transcribing process was started after finishing all the interviews, and it took around two months to transcribe them all. The researcher confirmed the accuracy of the data by reviewing all the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings. However, only the interview transcripts reported in the research were translated into English. To ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, each was sent directly to the interviewees so they could review them.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the systematic process of extracting information from data gained during the data collection process to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question (Bogden and Biklen, 1992); it consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study (Yin, 2002, p.19). A qualitative data analysis involves coding or categorising a large amount of research data; in this way, raw information is reduced in such a way so as to make sense of the data, after which the research themes are displayed, and conclusion drawn (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). In this research, the thematic analysis method has been employed to

form a clear picture of the research data. Thematic analysis helps in identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Although thematic analysis is rarely performed, it is considered a basic qualitative analysis method that provides a foundation for other qualitative approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006), while it also provides flexibility in application across any theoretical framework, which is suitable for researchers at the initial stage of their research. This flexibility allows for a detailed and complex description of the data.

Six phases of thematic analysis were applied in this research, starting with familiarisation with the data, which started by the transcription process. The researcher listened to all audio recordings several times to ensure they were transcribed accurately. The interviews were conducted in Thai for the convenience of both the researcher and interviewees, and the because doing so would eliminate some interesting information. After the transcription was completed, the researcher revisited all recordings to understand the mood and tone of the interviewees hidden in the data, and check once again the accuracy of the interview data. The researcher made sure to read all the transcriptions several times, in addition to another related document, so as to draw a clear picture of the phenomenon at hand, while she also took notes and marked some important ideas. This phase also helped the researcher to establish some core ideas related to the research context, and outline questions to be developed for the coding.

The second phases consisted of a generalisation of the initial codes to identify the codes and patterns that appeared in the research. The transcriptions were imported to NVivo for coding. Nodes were created at the beginning of the coding process because they were named by the factors specified in the conceptual framework. Other interesting factors that were not pre-identified were also created as nodes, after which data-driven coding was applied to identify patterns and meanings. The process of coding was done for each transcription until each case was completed; in this way, many nodes and sub-nodes were developed to explain how Thai HEIs have responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP, and to showcase views and obstacles from the perspective of interviewees. In addition, all interview transcripts were manually coded to make sure that no important information was lost. The researcher repeated this coding several times to ensure that all key information was collected and determined in the codes.

When the codes were identified, the researcher searched for themes to make sense of the data. In this stage, the coded nodes extracted through NVivo, together with the detailed references, were reviewed and reread to enable assumptions to be made on the data patterns. The codes were grouped into potential themes, gathering together all data relevant in each potential theme. Although NVivo served as a useful instrument to manage the huge amount of data, the researcher still played a vital role in developing the research theme and interpreting the data. Many related documents and publications were analysed such as the strategic planning of the selected universities and government documents, along with the codes that were designed to provide a clear picture of the research phenomenon.

The researcher first developed the research theme and then developed it, and also checked whether all the coded data were suitable to form a coherent pattern and generate a thematic map of analysis. In addition, the researcher reviewed the nodes clarified in NVivo and at the same time, reread the extracted interview transcripts to guarantee that the themes made sense, accounting for all codes and the entire dataset. The themes were defined and named when the key concepts of each were developed. These two stages required careful analysis and strong attention to detail; the researcher spent a large amount of time reviewing all codes from NVivo, the manual codes, and reference details to make assumptions about the preferred themes for this research.

The final phase of thematic analysis was to produce the report, which served as the last chance to analyse the research data. The researcher reviewed and reread all identified themes, and decided on which assumption could constitute a meaningful idea to understand the phenomenon under study. The process of coding the defining themes was revisited several times to verify the data and recheck whether the description was appropriate to represent the data. The similarities and differences between each case study were classified and compared to enable a cross-case analysis. All interviews sessions were conducted in Thai, and the translations from Thai to English were an integral part of writing the report, especially when quotations from the interviewees were required. The translation of the required interview transcripts was done by the researcher, who understands Thai culture and the research context, and knows both languages; any direct translation of certain words and phrases by translators who were not familiar with both cultures might give rise to misunderstandings and errors (Zimmerman and Szenberg, 2000). However, errors still inevitably occurred during the

process of translation because some Thai words do not have an exact equivalent in English. In such cases, the closest translations were applied to portray what the interviewees intended to express and communicate.

4.8 Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of qualitative research data is always an issue because it can be hard to measure. Yin (2003) suggested four criteria to judge the quality of qualitative research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. It was necessary for the researcher to consider these criteria when conducting this research and making a research plan. Construct validity is one of the most important factors in establishing the trustworthiness of a research study. It is usually thought necessary to avoid making subjective judgements about research data to establish the correct operational measures for the concept being studied (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) suggested three ways of establishing construct validity: the use of multiple sources of evidence; establishing a chain of evidence; and asking key informants to review the draft case study report. The researcher followed these approaches during this research. Multiple sources of evidence were applied, including data from interviews, journals, publications, reports, and government documents to cross-reference the interview data. In addition, copies of the interview transcripts were sent to all interviewees to review and check the accuracy of the research data to avoid bias and inconsistent information.

Internal validity is another factor that needs to be considered because it is a way of establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) recommends that researchers match patterns, build up explanations, and address alternative explanations and logic models to boost internal validity. In this research, the researcher seeks to understand the relationship between the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP and the operations of Thai HEIs, thus pattern-matching and explanation-building were applied as part of the data analysis process to explain the research data.

Another concern is the external validity or generalisability of the finding of the study in question (Rudestern and Newton, 2007). Such validity is a major concern in case study research because it involves establishing the domain to which a study's findings can

be generalised (Yin, 2003). Even though it might be argued that the findings from the three case studies of Thai HEIs obtained in this research can hardly enable generalisation, these samples do seem to be representative. The sample of this study was selected based on the type of university governance; whether they were autonomous, public, or private universities. Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that it is necessary to provide a rich description and the characteristics and social contexts of participants to ensure there is sufficient detail for people to make judgements about the transferability of the findings to other settings. This being so, the background information and contexts of each sample Thai HEIs were provided in detail to support the possible transferability of the findings across similar domains.

Reliability – another form of dependability – is also an important criterion that can be used to measure the quality of research, demonstrating that the operations of a study, such as the data collection procedures, can be repeated, with the same result (Yin, 2003); in other words, whether the same results can be obtained from the same research design. According to Yin (2003), the case study protocol and the development of a case study database during the data collection process can serve as supporting evidence for the reliability of research. In this research, the same procedures for the interviews and analysis were employed for each case study to ensure consistency. The procedure of the first interview was recorded so it could be used as a case study protocol to act as a guideline for the later interviews.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Empirical education research inevitably gives rise to ethical issues because the main source of data is from and about people (Punch, 2009). Ethical issues must be considered in all steps of research, from the framing the study to reporting the data. Researchers are obliged to pay attention to all ethical issues that arise in the research process, and decide on how best to manage them. In this paper, the researcher employed the Code of Good Practice in Research Integrity of the University of Bath (2014) and the Ethical Guideline for Educational Research (2011) published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), obtained informed consent from all participants, and followed academic norms about interview ethic and data anonymity.

When conducting research at Thai HEIs, or interviewing staff members at these institutions, it is customary to send an official letter asking for permission to do so to the head of each relevant department. In her letter, the researcher provided detailed information about this study including the background of the research, the research objectives, the research questions, and a letter of consent. This letter of consent identified several elements of the research such as its purpose, the research process, the main contact person, the risks and disadvantages to participation, assuring that participants would be given the right to withdraw from the research at any time, and addressing the issue of participant confidentiality. After permission was granted and the interviewees assigned by the head of the university, the researcher directly sent the official letter, together with the letter of consent, to the interviewees to inform them about the research process. Participants were also asked for verbal permission before the interview sessions; this was deemed acceptable for this research because previous experience suggests that written consent is sometimes considered awkward and/or culturally inappropriate in the Thai context.

Before each interview session, the interview questions and letter of consent were directly sent to the interviewees in advance to inform them that a semi-structured format would be employed in the interview, and that unexpected questions might arise during the interview. The researcher also explained the interview process and the interviewees' rights before the start. Permission to make audio recordings was asked, and all interviewees agreed. All interview sessions were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere with sufficient privacy, mostly in the interviewees' working space, or in a private meeting room in their university. Sometimes, the researcher was asked to stop recording because the discussion was sensitive, and considered to have touched on confidential information. Such information that related to the research context was written down and presented to the interviewees at the end of the interview session for assurance that the information was correct and appropriate.

Other crucial issues for ethical consideration are the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants. The identity of the representative Thai HEIs and interviewees were kept anonymous and confidential. Although some of the interviewees were willing to use their own name and that of their university, most preferred for this information to remain confidential, and therefore pseudonyms were assigned when reporting the results. The universities are referred to as 'University A,' 'University B,' and 'University

C, based on the type of university governance. The name, position, and other characteristics of the interviewees' identity were not mentioned in this research, and their roles were discussed as little as possible because they are relevant to their responsibility and views and perspectives. All the research data collected from the participants were stored in a password-protected personal computer.

4.10 Limitations of the Research

A general concern about case-based research is its lack of rigour, generalisability, time-consuming nature, and that it gives rise to a massive amount of data (Yin, 2002). Due to concerns about rigour, the researcher followed the above research design. A lack of rigour should not be a concern for this research. Possible generalisation is a common concern for case-based research (Yin, 2014). However, for this research, the main goal is analytic generalisation, not statistical generalisation; this research is intended to explore in-depth information about the research context and phenomenon to expand on and generalise theories, rather than focus on probability or statistical information.

Another limitation of case-based research is that it can be time-consuming. As mentioned previously, this research sought to understand the research context, which required a large amount of data, so it being time-consuming was inevitably a great concern for the researcher, when she took the time to gather and analyse the data. Being a PhD thesis, there is a three to four years' limit for this research, which was deemed appropriate to complete this research. The researcher discussed the research plan with her supervisor at the beginning, and strictly followed the resulting plan, and therefore the amount of time required is not considered a limitation of this research, but it could be used as one of the criteria for the research plan.

4.11 Chapter summary

This research was designed as a case-based research to analyse the rich amount of information available on the operations of Thai HEIs in light of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Three Thai HEIs were selected as case studies for this research that were representative of each type of Thai university governance: autonomous, public, and private universities. These three universities shared the common characteristics that

they have the highest number of students enrolled in tourism and hospitality programmes.

The main source of qualitative data is the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in each interview session to gain as much relevant information as possible. Other resources such as journals, reports, related documents, and government publications were also employed to ensure the completeness of this research data. After transcribing all the interview data, NVivo was used to manage the data. The nodes and codes were extracted by NVivo, while the researcher developed the themes and constructed meanings from the data. The validity and reliability of the research has also been discussed, as well as possible ethical considerations and limitations.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

In the previous chapter, the study's research design was introduced and rationalised. This chapter provides an account of the data collected and core findings. This chapter begins a process of elucidating the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai higher education institutions (HEIs) and how they operated and responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Core themes identified from the interviews are presented. Findings from the three institutional case studies are presented, from which generalisations pertaining to the response of the Thai higher education sector to the ASEAN MRA-TP are extrapolated. Information about the universities, i.e., vision and mission of university, the development of university, are provided to draw a clear picture of the settings and understand the nature of Thai higher education. The full data findings of each case study are finally explained in the last section in order to cover essential information of this study.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by introducing the overarching themes to have emerged from the interviews; which are represented into three perspectives of policy governance: regional, national and institutional. The second part of the chapter provides a description of each institutional context investigated. The main characteristics of the three universities are shown in table 6 to easily compare and understand the nature of each case study. Background information is provided, including the year of each university's establishment, size, number of campuses, staff, students and programmes offered, as well as brief details on each university's status and strategies. Not only this information, but also the summary of tourism and hospitality programmes offered in each university are also presented in this section.

The three institutional case studies are then presented and discussed in the third section. The findings from each university are explained as case studies. These kinds of findings can provide an indication of activities that Thai HEIs are currently implementing to support the ASEAN MRA-TP as well as the role of the government sector in supporting Thai HEIs and the ASEAN MRA-TP. The chapter ends with a

synthesis of divergence and convergence in the context of institutional responses to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

5.2 Core themes

This chapter considers data derived from interviews with 30 university staff and government officials on the impacts of ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai higher education institutions and how they operated to respond it. During interviews, interviewees discussed how their universities were responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The interview questions applied in this research mainly focused on four core areas, namely the preparation of each university, institutional awareness of ASEAN MRA-TP, university governance, and the engagement of universities by government as related to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The first area of interview questions covered the policies and strategies of universities and the activities that universities were implementing to support the ASEAN MRA-TP. The second area of interview questions focused on perceptions of the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP and the relevance between Thai HEIs and the ASEAN MRA-TP from the perspectives of the interviewees. The third core area examined the influence of government toward to operations of Thai HEIs. The last area of interview questions was concerned with the support from the government in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The interview data was scrutinised inductively and by using thematic analysis. The key themes emerged from original data gained during the interview. Throughout the interview transcripts and documents, researcher worked in line-by-line coding to enable for ideas, action, and concept to emerge from data. After that, researcher reviewed, examined and grouped the codes into category in order to easily identify the suitable theme of this research. The codes of this research are Impacts of ASEAN, Impact of ASEAN MRA-TP, Internationalisation of Thai HEIs, Universities activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, Roles of government, Expectation from government, Problems in the work of government, and Internal administration of Thai HEIs. Table 9 showed the sub-coded, codes and the description of each code in order to clarify the core idea emerged from this research finding

Code	Code description	Sub coded	Research question
Impact of ASEAN	ASEAN is recognised by HEIs as a regional commitment. However, it had little effect on the operation of Thai HEIs.	Importance, Regional commitment, Policy, Principles, Lack of concern	RQ1
Impact of ASEAN MRA-TP	The importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP is a matter of concern for Thai HEIs. However, it is not very relevant to the operations of Thai HEIs.	Importance, Awareness, Regional agreement, Policy, Principles, Standard, Common curriculum, Less impact, Benefit, Disadvantage, Irrelevance to Thai HEIs	RQ1
Internationalisation of Thai HEIs	Internationalisation had a long period of development in Thai HEIs. Many activities under the internationalisation policy are still effective and served as key mechanisms in response to all international activities of Thai HEIs, including the ASEAN MRA-TP.	MOU, Student and staff Exchange, International students, International programme, International standards, International activities of Thai HEIs, Existing policy	RQ1, RQ3
University activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP	The sample of Thai HEIs did not formulate a new policy to support the ASEAN MRA-TP. They responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP by applying the existing academic activities. TQF plays an important role in curriculum development. The common future plans of Thai HEIs are to send their staff to train to become ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers at both the national and regional level and to be the ASEAN MRA-TP centre.	Policy, English language development, Staff development, Way of teaching, Skill training, ASEAN MRA-TP Training, ASEAN MRA-TP centre, TQF	RQ1, RQ3
Role of government	The government sector is responsible for policy making and planning at the national level as well as for providing support for Thai HEIs in terms of budget and government activities. Raising awareness of the ASEAN MRA-TP	Policy and plan at national level, Budget support, Activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, Raise awareness for ASEAN MRA-TP	RQ1, RQ2

Code	Code description	Sub coded	Research question
	in Thailand is also important for the government.		
Expectations from the government	A clear direction, policy, and plan for implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP is necessary for Thai HEIs	Clear direction, Policy and plan, Budget, Leading role in implementation, Advertisement	RQ2
Problems with the work of government	The vagueness of the government in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP is presented through the duplication of work between the government agencies. The agency responsible for the ASEAN MRA-TP is still in doubt.	Unclear direction, Vagueness, Duplicate work, Lack of cooperation, Unstable political situation, Discontinuity of policy and activities, Responsible agency for the ASEAN MRA-TP, Bureaucracy system	RQ2
Internal administration of Thai HEIs	The flexibility of work process is expressed when Thai HEIs are not under bureaucratic control. However, the flexible work does not affect the operations of Thai HEIs.	Vision of Thai HEIs, , Priority area of study, Influence of government, Budget allocation for tourism programme, Flexible	RQ3

Table 9: Codes emerged from research findings

Therefore, the three main themes were extracted from the codes and conceptualisation of interviewees towards the operations of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP which are:

- The perspectives for policy at the regional governance level
- The perspectives for policy at the national governance level
- The perspectives for policy at the institutional governance level

These three main themes represent the views and perspectives of interviewees in each case study on the regional, national and institutional policies and governances related to the ASEAN MRA-TP. These themes reflect the operations of the Thai HEI case studies' in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP in the three policy and governance levels.

The first theme explained in this research is concerned with the role and importance of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP. All interviewees from the three universities are

aware of the importance of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP as a regional commitment. However, they expressed low levels of interest in ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP and their lack of relevance in the operations of Thai HEIs. They suggested that the ASEAN MRA-TP could provide both advantages and disadvantages for Thai HEIs. The ASEAN MRA-TP seemed to be for the benefit of the curriculum and staff development. Most of the interviewees suggested that the ASEAN MRA-TP could serve as a guideline for understanding the competencies and standards required for ASEAN tourism professionals. The ASEAN MRA-TP also serves as a training tool for staff development. However, the interviewees mentioned many disadvantages of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP, the low level of interest of Thai graduates to work in the ASEAN labour market, and the low relevance of the ASEAN MRA-TP and Thai society were mentioned as obstacles to successful ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand.

As the ASEAN MRA-TP is an agreement at the regional level, it is necessary for the Thai government to take a leading role in its implementation and cooperate with other stakeholder agencies in the country. The policy at the national governance level is thus of concern for this research. However, many interviewees experienced difficulties regarding the performance of the Thai government. A lack of clarity concerning which government agency is responsible for the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand and the overlapping work between government agencies became main obstacles to the work of Thai HEIs in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP. Past experience rejecting some of the government's activities was also raised as another obstacle to the operation of Thai HEIs. These factors sometimes interrupted Thai HEIs' projects or academic activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, interviewees from all three universities strongly suggested that the government sector should take a leading role in the implementation process of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand as well as issue any governing mandates other stakeholder agencies must follow in order to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The third theme has been explained as the policy perspectives at the institutional governance level. The identification of isomorphic behaviour and the homogeneous response to the ASEAN MRA-TP by Thai HEIs is explicit. All interviewees suggested that retaining existing university policies and strategies, especially the policy regarding the internationalisation of higher education, seemed to be the best way to

support the ASEAN MRA-TP. The interviewees agreed that the academic activities of Thai HEIs under the internationalisation policy could support ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP. Some activities were suggested as university plans to support the ASEAN MRA-TP, e.g. special classes for English language development, an English exit exam, building more training rooms, and staff exchange. The differences in financial support and the internal administration of the three types of universities in Thailand as well as some differences in their backgrounds and characteristics surprisingly did not affect the operation of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The interviewees noticed little effect of university governance on budget allocation for any academic activities, and the decision-making processes were still the same, with the most important academic activities related to university plans with the highest budget allocation. The private university seemed to have an advantage in that it manages its own revenue, and decisions concerning academic activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP are made faster compared to the autonomous and public universities, which still had to comply with bureaucratic systems.

These core themes and the policy perspectives at the regional governance level, the national governance level, and the institutional governance level can portray the whole picture of the happenings in Thai higher education and the key factors that affected the operation of Thai HEIs. These core themes also express the shared perception of the interviewees towards the ASEAN MRA-TP, the universities' activities, and the isomorphic influence on the operations of Thai HEIs in this research, which supported the use of institutional isomorphism as the theoretical framework. The idea of regionalism hidden in the principles of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP is also expressed in the research findings. It helps the researcher understand the actions of the Thai government and Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

5.3 Institutional characteristics

The institutional characteristics are important for this research as they can provide the natural setting of each case study for better understanding on the phenomenon of this study. These characteristics also provide the clear picture on the differences of each case study which might reflect to the operation of university in responding to

ASEAN MRA-TP. The table 10 below summarised and compared the information of each case study.

Characteristics	University A	University B	University C
General Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment year • Size • No. of campus • No. of programmes • No. of staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic staff • Supporting staff • No. of student (all) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International students • Research output • Type of university (based on OHEC) 	1943 Large (20.79 km ²) 4 588 More than 3,000 More than 6,000 More than 70,000 202 High Research University	1994 Medium (2.08 km ²) 2 160 More than 1,000 More than 3,000 More than 35,000 111 Medium Comprehensive U.	1993 Small 2 10 More than 50 More than 100 More than 3,000 12 Medium Specialised University
University Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status • Financial support • Academic Admin. • Personnel Admin. • Financial Admin. 	Autonomous Partial support from government Autonomy Autonomy Autonomy	Public Fully support from government Autonomy Partial autonomy Gov. regulated	Private Own revenue Autonomy Autonomy Autonomy
Tourism and Hospitality programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status • Establishment year • No. of programmes • No. of staff • No. of student 	Department 1981 7 more than 30 more than 3,000	Faculty 2001 4 more than 30 more than 3,000	Faculty 1993 10 more than 160 more than 3,000

Table 10: The main characteristics of each case study in the research

According to Table 10, there are significant differences between these three sample universities. As seen, University A is the oldest university. It was established in the modernisation period to support the agricultural education. Meanwhile, University B and University C were established in the same period, a period of massification of

higher education. University A is not only the oldest university, but also the biggest university. University A has up to four campus with the largest area in total. The high number of campus of University A also reflects to the highest number of enrolled students and staff as well as the number of offered programmes when compared with other sample Thai HEIs. Although University B and University C have the same number of campuses, the differences in the number of staff, students, and offered programmes are significant. The supporting reason for these differences is the role of the university. Compared to University C, University B has positioned itself as a comprehensive/4-year university with multidisciplinary study programmes, while University C is a specialised university with a limited number of study programmes. Moreover, the position of the university affects the research intensity. University A, as a research university, has a high level of research intensity compared to University B and University C.

Having considered the tourism and hospitality programmes offered by these three universities, the study of tourism and hospitality at University A is in the form of a department under the faculty of Humanities. Interestingly, University C has the highest number of staff in the tourism and hospitality area when compared to the other universities. The main reason is that University C is a specialised university in the tourism and hospitality area. All staff at University C are responsible only for the tourism and hospitality area, while more than 30 staff at Universities A and B are related to the tourism and hospitality area.

In terms of university governance, the major difference between these three universities is in terms of support from the government. In the context of budgeting, the whole budget of University B, as a public university, is from the government. University A, as an autonomous university, receives support from the government in the form of block grant, which reflects project-based budgeting. In the meantime, University C, as a private university is financially independent, with no support from the government. Therefore, the level of government control in these three universities is different. Universities A and C are far from governmental bureaucracy, while University B is required to follow the rules and regulations of government.

It is seen that these three sample universities are different both in the characteristics and government support. These differences have been used as the factors in considering the performance of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. They

are also useful for researcher in interpreting the behaviours of each sample university. In the next section, the policy governance in three level; regional level, national level and institutional level, are identified. These information provide the overview picture on the principles and process of the ASEAN MRA-TP which is useful for understanding the behaviour of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

5.4 Understanding the policy governance of the ASEAN MRA-TP

Regional level

ASEAN member states agreed in AFAS to liberalise trade in services. Under this agreement, the ASEAN MRA-TP was developed to facilitate the freer movement of qualified tourism professionals across the region. Interestingly, nine ASEAN member states agreed to this and signed the agreement in 2009. Thailand was the only country that took advantage of the consensus principle of ASEAN by delaying signing the agreement for three years. However, it was signed by all ASEAN tourism ministers and enforced in 2012.

For effective operation, the infrastructure of ASEAN MRA-TP is required to be established at both the regional and national level. At the regional level, ATPMC, established in 2010, along with the regional secretariat, is responsible for supervising all operations to implement the ASEAN MRA-TP. This committee also facilitates the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in all ASEAN member countries. Apart from its role as a monitoring board, establishing the main infrastructures is also a duty of this committee. APTRS, launched in 2016, was developed as the platform by which to register and exchange the details of certified ASEAN tourism professionals.

In terms of common competency standards, ASEAN cooperates with Australia through the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Programme to develop ACCSTP, CATC, and the training toolboxes. These infrastructures are used as the mechanism to equivalent the certified ASEAN tourism professionals. The training toolboxes for common competencies in six divisions have been developed for training master trainers, master assessors, and tourism professionals. The ASEAN master trainers and assessors are responsible for teaching the national trainers and assessors how to train the tourism professionals in their respective countries. The national trainers and assessors are the representatives of public and private

stakeholders in each member country. The policy governance at the regional level can provide a clear picture of the principles and processes of the ASEAN MRA-TP. This information can serve as a guideline for implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP at the national level. The next section suggests the key component for the national level, which is required by the regional committee, as well as the national policy related to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

National level

At the national level, ASEAN member states are required to establish two key components to facilitate the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in their respective countries: TPCB and NTPB. TPCB is the government board responsible for the assessment and certification of tourism professionals in each ASEAN member country. NTPB is the group of representatives from the public and private sector responsible for advertising and building awareness of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Moreover, this committee is also responsible for monitoring and updating the ACCSTP and CATC at the national level. The NTPB of each member country must report the concerns and data related to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP to ATPMC on a quarterly basis.

As explained earlier, Thailand delayed signing the ASEAN MRA-TP for three years. The main reason for the delay was concern about the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP. During that period, Thailand, through MOTS, worked hard with other stakeholders both in the public and private sectors, including Thai HEIs, to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the Thai context. Moreover, MOTS took this opportunity to brainstorm with stakeholders regarding the general direction in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, after the signing, Thailand could immediately proceed with the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

MOTS was appointed by the cabinet to serve as the main agency responsible for the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. The duties of MOTS include performing in compliance with the commitment in the ASEAN MRA-TP, providing recommendations and guidelines for the implementation process, and cooperating with stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. The priority tasks are to establish two national committees, as mentioned in the agreement, and build awareness of the ASEAN MRA-TP. TPCB and NTPB were established within 180

days of signing the agreement. TPCB is a committee comprised of high-ranking officials from related public and private agencies. The NTPB committee is comprised of experts in the tourism and hospitality industry and stakeholder representatives. MOTS serves as the secretariat of both committees. Together, these two committees are the key infrastructure for operating and monitoring the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand.

In addition to setting up the committees, MOTS is required to prepare training resources for tourism professionals at the national level. The ASEAN MRA-TP training toolboxes have been reviewed and translated into the Thai language by Thai HEIs. These toolboxes for common competencies are designed for six labour divisions and used for training for the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate. MOTS also works closely with Thai HEIs in terms of trainers and assessors. The representatives from Thai HEIs and the expert stakeholders were selected to train to be ASEAN master trainers and assessors. This group of experts thus serves as the national trainers and assessors for Thai tourism professionals.

The role of Thai HEIs in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP has been strengthened as they are key partners of MOTS. In the earliest stage, six Thai HEIs signed the MOU with MOTS to serve as the ASEAN MRA-TP network. The goals of this network were to promote and advertise ASEAN MRA-TP information among Thai HEIs and the public and private sector and serve as a cooperation centre for assessing tourism professionals. However, these MOUs were withdrawn due to a change in the cabinet.

Having considered the importance of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP, the OHEC, as the policy body of higher education, has developed the policy to support ASEAN and its activities. The OHEC launched the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008-2022) and the Strategies of Thai Higher Education for the Preparation for the ASEAN Community in 2015 as guidelines for Thai higher education. Building awareness of ASEAN and its activities, improving the English competencies of graduates, and enhancing the importance of the internationalisation of higher education are mentioned in these plans. In terms of the quality and standards of higher education, the OHEC has also developed the Thai Qualification Framework for Higher Education (TQF) as a guideline to ensure the standard and award titles for higher education qualification in Thailand as well as determine the

equivalents of degrees awarded from foreign higher education institutions. Interestingly, the ASEAN MRA-TP has been considered one of the standard frameworks for developing the TQF in tourism and hospitality programmes.

In order to facilitate the labour movement process, MOTS cooperates with MOL in granting work permits to certified ASEAN tourism professionals so they can work legally in Thailand. MOL has now agreed to and accepted the qualification of certified ASEAN tourism professionals. They can now apply for work permits by presenting the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate. MOL also adjusted the skills training programme in the tourism and hospitality industry using the ASEAN MRA-TP as a reference.

Institutional level

After the higher education reform, Thai HEIs were classified into three groups based on their governance: autonomous university, public university, and private university. These three groups are differentiated by the government budget allocation they receive and the level of government influence. Autonomous universities are state-supervised agencies. The budgets of these universities are mostly based on their income and earnings. The government only allocates the block grant, a project-based budget. Meanwhile, public universities still have the status of government agencies under government regulation; they receive full financial support from the government. The private universities are not regulated by the government and have the freedom to manage their own budgets and human resources.

However, all Thai HEIs have academic freedom. In Thailand, Thai HEIs have the authority to manage their offered programmes, launch new programmes, develop existing programmes, and terminate programmes as well as academic activities. However, Thai HEIs have to submit the related documents to the OHEC for acknowledgement. They are able to develop their own policies and strategies under the supervision of university councils. Each Thai HEI has its own university council to monitor its operations and management. The key responsibilities of a university council are to formulate the university's policies and regulations, approve new programmes, and withdraw existing programmes. The policies of Thai HEIs differ based on their vision and direction, but they are mostly designed to support the national policy and strategies for increasing the competitiveness of the country. Therefore, the role of each university, i.e. research university, comprehensive

university, and specialised university, is also important for identifying the strategies of a university as well as its academic activities.

Although Thai HEIs are able to enjoy academic freedom, the Thai government is concerned with the standard and quality of education at the university level. The OHEC has introduced an accreditation and quality assurance system to guarantee that the programmes offered by Thai HEIs meet the standard criteria and requirements. In order to ensure that the standard for academic awards are consistent for all Thai HEIs, the TQF has been developed as the key mechanism to ensure the quality and standard of higher education programmes. All Thai HEIs are required to follow the minimum standards and requirements explained in the TQF.

International cooperation and international standards also concern Thai HEIs. The internationalisation of higher education has been developing for over 20 years with the intention of supporting the rapid political and socioeconomic changes in Thailand. Many academic activities, such as staff and student exchange, joint degree programmes, and international programmes in Thai HEIs, have been applied under the umbrella of internationalisation. Throughout this long period of development, the internationalisation of higher education has become a solid foundation in response to the international agenda of Thai HEIs.

5.5 Case study 1: University A

Background

The first university in this study was established in 1943, with the intention of the government being to develop agricultural education in Thailand. It was the first public university in Thailand, situated in the heart of Bangkok, focusing only on agricultural studies, with a focus on co-operative sciences and forestry. This university has four campuses across Thailand and offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate studies over 29 faculties. With its successful development, this university was nominated by the government to be one of the research universities. Moreover, this university has also changed its status to be an autonomous university.

University A now employs over 10,000 academic and supporting staff on a 30:70 ratio. Most academic staff are lecturers and assistant professors. Nearly 16 percent are professors and associate professors. A little over 2,000 of these academic staff have

a PhD qualification and nearly 1,400 of them have a Master's level degree. University A has nearly 70,000 enrolled students, including 60,000 undergraduate students and nearly 10,000 Master's and Doctoral students. In terms of taught programmes, the university offers 588 programmes in total, 40 of which have an explicitly international focus.

As an autonomous university, University A exercises freedom from government bureaucracy in managing its budgets, university resources and academic affairs. While an autonomous entity, the university still receives block grant involving project-based budgeting. The President of the university and the Management Board have the responsibility for its general management, formulation of policies and strategies for the university's development as well as budget management. However, the University Council, the executive and policy-making body of the university, exercises overall executive control.

University A has intended to develop itself to be an excellent academic provider to support sustainable development in the country. Being recognised in the international community is also another vision of University A. It plans to achieve its mission on academic excellence by gathering and developing various aspects of wisdom and knowledge, together with producing graduates who have high moral and critical thinking skills and meet international requirements. Efficiently managing the university's resources and working closely with the community in order to ensure the peace and stability of the country are also part of its mission to support its role as the leading university in Thailand, while strengthening its status in the international community.

In terms of policies and strategies, University A has recently launched a new long-range strategic plan to develop its operations. The main concept of this plan is to improve the quality of graduates, and learning and teaching process in order to achieve its goal of being a world-class university. University A has planned to develop its infrastructure, including IT and laboratories, to support its high-impact research to increase the country's competitiveness. An internationalisation strategy is a key part of its ambitions for research excellence. Keeping its curriculum up-to-date, together with developing the quality of lecturers, are important strategies of this plan. Moreover,

University A also reviews and adjusts its organisational structure, its regulations and internal management to support the role of being an autonomous university.

Tourism and hospitality programmes at this university are offered at the main campus and other campuses. The main reason for offering tourism and hospitality programmes on a satellite campus is to expand the educational opportunity to rural areas. The programmes offered on a campus should also respond to the needs of the community. However, there is some variation in the core content of the degrees at each campus. A degree in Arts offered at the main campus emphasises general knowledge and essential skills in tourism and hospitality. On the other hand, a degree in Management at another campus focuses more on management skills. There are over five tourism and hospitality programmes offered at this university, with more than 3,000 enrolled students, both at undergraduate and graduate levels. The tourism and hospitality programmes at this university has been in existence over 20 years and can be claimed as the first undergraduate programme in tourism and hospitality in Thailand.

The main goal of the tourism and hospitality programme of this university is to produce tourism professionals who have the skills and competencies expected in international standards. The career education approach has been applied in the teaching and learning process of this university in order to support the needs of skilled labour in the tourism labour market. Tourism and hospitality programmes in Thailand have to follow the qualification framework of OHEC. An interdisciplinary approach is an explicit facet of the tourism and hospitality curriculum. The tourism and hospitality programme of University A focuses more on integrating English language with tourism and hospitality knowledge. A period of four months of internship has been designed as part of this curriculum. Strengthening the network with both public and private stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality area, i.e. hotel business, travel agencies or other organisations in the tourism and hospitality area, is considered as one of the missions of University A in improving its quality of education. Academic co-operation with other educational institutions in the tourism and hospitality area has also been continuously developed. Many academic activities co-operating with other organisations, such as joint programmes with other universities or special courses provided by the hotel business and travel agencies, have been added in the tourism and hospitality programme of University A for the benefit of its students.

Themes from the data

5.5.1 The perspectives for policy at the regional governance level

Interviewees at University A recognised that “ASEAN is a part of the world community. Few of those interviewed at University A attributed much in the way of operational or strategic importance to ASEAN. They all agreed that ASEAN was interesting and becoming an important issue for the Thai government in formulating policy to facilitate any ASEAN activities. However, they also stated that the role and activities of ASEAN were similar to other international organisations. The perception was that it had less impact on the work of their university. As one member of management staff explained:

“ASEAN is important, I agreed, but it is not the most important issue for our policy formulation. The need of labour market and market positioning of our university is the thing that we need to concern.”

(Interviewee AM2)

Interviewees from University A also agreed that the ASEAN MRA-TP would affect the operations of the university, however, it was still not the biggest concern of their university. As the ASEAN MRA-TP had been designed as a filter in screening qualified tourism professionals for the ASEAN labour market, it definitely has both advantages and disadvantages in the views of university staff, who have to produce qualified graduates as well as satisfy graduate employers. The biggest advantage of the ASEAN MRA-TP for the university in the view of interviewees was as a framework for curriculum development. Thai universities can compare their own tourism and hospitality curriculum with the ASEAN MRA-TP standard to identify what contents and requirements they need to adjust and oversee. It also helps them to evaluate the skill proficiency level of their graduates. One member of staff expressed a view towards this point as:

“I personally believe that ASEAN MRA-TP is of benefit for us. We at least know the expectation of tourism professional qualification in each level. We can look back to our curriculum and understand what level we are now. It can also be used as a guideline for teaching and we can adjust our contents in order to prepare our students for this standard.” (Interviewee AS2)

The disadvantage of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the views of the interviewees was high competition for graduate jobs. The ASEAN MRA-TP can be used as a new instrument for qualified workers in moving to work legally in other ASEAN countries. This phenomenon might lead to intensifying competition in the Thailand tourism labour market as Thailand is recognised as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Asia. Another concern of interviewees was the different level of development in the ASEAN tourism industry. Each ASEAN member country has its own styles and values in service work. Some differences in cultures and ways of life would affect the standards of service work in each ASEAN country. Hence, there are different standards in the tourism industry across ASEAN. Therefore, when applying a common standard in the ASEAN tourism business without considering these differences, it might be a benefit for some countries but might be treated as a disadvantage for other countries. As one management staff member commented:

“Actually, the concept of ASEAN MRA-TP is valuable in the view of personnel development. If there is the common standard for all ASEAN nations, our labour will be developed at the same level of other countries. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a limit for some countries. If the ASEAN MRA-TP standards cannot equally support all countries with the reasons of the different on tourism and hotel industries and cultural context, it will be an advantage for some countries and a disadvantage for others. Other thing is ... the opportunity in getting a job for our graduates. ASEAN MRA-TP should be our instrument to help us sending our graduates to work in ASEAN, but I think it is not for us, it helps other countries, ... not Thailand.”

(Interviewee AM1)

As mentioned earlier, there is a difference in national identity between ASEAN member countries. Applying the ASEAN MRA-TP standard without considering these identities brings a risk of failure. As one member of management staff suggested:

“When we are forced to use the same standards as other countries, we need to understand diversity and difference in contexts and culture. I know that we use the common standards when we work in tourism industries, but the little things in each country, such as special characteristics of Thai people, who love to smile and they have a

service outlook or some prohibitions in Muslim countries, it is different. I think ASEAN MRA-TP is hard for the workers who worked in the industries because they all have skills and know well what they worked on.” (Interviewee AM1)

However, the concept of the ASEAN MRA-TP may be beneficial to both the university and graduates as a new channel for job seeking. University A seems to make no major investment in its institutional implementation. The main reason is a concern about the suitability of the ASEAN MRA-TP standard and the content of the ASEAN curriculum. ASEAN and the William Angliss Institute in Australia had worked together in designing and developing the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and standard. After that, the ASEAN secretariat sent the draft of the ASEAN MRA-TP standards to MOTS Thailand as the key co-ordinator in order to contribute these standards to many stakeholders for review and comment, such as hotels and universities. University A staff had a chance to review these standards and found that they were not considered as international standards. Some contents were based on contexts specific to Australia, which do not easily translate to an ASEAN context. As one staff member described:

“Personally, I think ASEAN MRA-TP did not have much effect on Thai higher education. Since it was announced, I have a chance to train for being a trainer and found that it is quite hard to apply this standard to our curriculum because the context is different. This standard is designed by William Angliss Institute in Australia. Some contents are not support Thai context.” (Interviewee AS3)

Focusing on international standards and the graduate employability of tourism in an international context were other reasons for University A to ignore the ASEAN MRA-TP. Interviewees from University A suggested that their tourism and hospitality curriculum is closely related to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. Together with their views that the ASEAN MRA-TP standard is not considered as international standards, the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP is decreasing. This perspective is reflected in curriculum development, as the university is now in the process of curriculum development. Its new curriculum will focus on the changing world and the tourism business. The ASEAN MRA-TP standard has been considered as one of the

frameworks for development, however University A did not pay much attention to this framework. As one member of staff described:

“Frankly, I did not see any impacts because we did not concern ourselves with this standard. We, University A and this department, used to work for MOTS. We translate and write the manual for the ASEAN MRA-TP standard on food services. We gave back a comment to MOTS and explained that some of the standards written by William Angliss cannot apply to Thailand. Some of them are not up-to-date. Not only did our university give these kinds of comments, MOTS had also sent this standard to businesses and they commented in the same way. They said that it is not an international standard. Therefore, when we had designed a new curriculum on tourism, we did not focus any more on the ASEAN MRA-TP. We are more concerned with the changing trends of the world and the service industry, innovation and tourism for meetings, events or incentive travel.” (Interviewee AS4)

The success of ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in ASEAN member countries is one of the main concerns. Interviewees at University A suggested that diversity in ASEAN member nations is important factor that must be considered. As seen, ASEAN is culturally and linguistically diverse. Apart from that, ASEAN member states also have different stage in economic development and different political system. These diversities lead to the different stage of ASEAN MRA-TP implementation, as well as the level of awareness on the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP. . Neglecting such concerns forms a reason for the failure of ASEAN MRA-TP implementation. As one management staff suggested:

“When we are forced to use the same standards with other countries, we need to understand the diversity and difference in contexts and culture. I know that we use the common standards when we work in tourism industries, but the little things in each country such as special characteristic of Thai people, love to smile and their service mind or some prohibitions in Muslim countries, it is different. I think ASEAN MRA-TP is hard for the labours who worked in the industries because

they all have skills and know well on what they worked.” (Interviewee AM1)

Moreover, jobs in ASEAN countries are not targeted by Thai graduates. One interviewee explained that most graduate students seek work in the United States of America or European countries instead of ASEAN countries. The main reason for this being the higher rate of remuneration and greater opportunity for career advancement. In addition, working with an international hotel chain may provide an opportunity to work outside Thailand. Qualified workers with good performance can get promoted and move to work in other countries in a chain without being concerned about any standards. As one lecturer mentioned:

“Working with a hotel chain and getting promoted to work in other countries can be an easier way to move and they were not concerned with any ASEAN standards. They just follow the hotel standards and show their good performance and they will get promoted. From now, there is no report showing the significant movement of Thai tourism professionals to work in ASEAN countries. ASEAN countries are not the targeted countries for skilled Thai labour.” (Interviewee AS2)

5.5.2 The perspectives for policy at the national governance level

The role of government as the main responsible agency in driving the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand was mentioned during the interviews. As the ASEAN MRA-TP is an agreement signed by the cabinet, the government has a significant role to play in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. Therefore, the government's direction in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP is necessary for all stakeholders, including Thai HEIs. Many problems related to the operation of government in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP were raised by interviewees as obstacles in operating Thai HEIs, i.e. unclear direction and overlapping work between government agencies.

Interviewees from University A have direct experience of working with the government. University A is one of the universities which worked closely with both MOTS in translating the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum on food services, and with

OHEC in developing the qualification framework on tourism and hospitality programme. Through their perspectives, the main obstacle in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand is the lack of communication and co-operation between government agencies. In fact, the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand relates to many government agencies, such as MOTS, MOL, MOE and OHEC. MOTS serves as the main responsible agency while MOL is responsible for the skills standard of workers. MOE and OHEC concern on providing tourism and hospitality curriculum standards. These agencies have to work closely together and share their information to achieve the ASEAN MRA-TP. However, in reality the sharing of information hardly ever happens in Thailand. There is a great deal of overlapping work between MOTS and MOL, or even MOTS and OHEC, which affects the operations of Thai HEIs in terms of collecting necessary information about the ASEAN MRA-TP. As one staff member remarked:

“... it does not have a clear direction from the government. It is not clear who will take the responsibility for the ASEAN MRA-TP at the government level, MOTS or MOL. It is an overlap between MOTS and MOL. OHEC, as the higher education agency, should get involved in terms of curriculum and standards. In the overall picture now, each agency works on its own and is not concerned with other agencies. That kind of work makes me confused.” (Interviewee AS2)

A management staff member added:

“... the problem is the process of transferring the information to other related agencies. For us, we have a plan to be an ASEAN MRA-TP training centre in Thailand and we are interested in sending our staff to train to be master trainers. Unfortunately, we did not receive any information about training times or even the criteria of selection from MOTS. After that, I know from my friend that the master trainers had already been selected. I do not understand why this situation has happened. I think MOTS and the government should be aware of this point.” (Interviewee AM1)

However, the government sector still plays a vital role in driving the ASEAN MRA-TP into practice and also directly affects the operation of universities. As mentioned earlier, government policy and direction can be used as a framework for university plans. Therefore, interviewees suggested that if the government intends to promote the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand and requires more support from the universities, the government, as well as OHEC, should put more emphasis on the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP by launching a direct policy and plans to support it, asking the universities to follow. As one member of staff said:

“I will say ... if the OHEC want us to support the ASEAN MRA-TP standard, the OHEC needs to force us to do it. The OHEC has to discuss this topic with MOTS and MOL or even the Tourism Council of Thailand. We should follow the way of other professional areas, such as engineering or medicine, in terms of professional licences. If we have professional a licence for tourism professionals, every university who offers tourism and hospitality programmes will follow the rules and adjust their curricula.” (Interviewee AS3)

The work of government agencies in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP was still questioned by interviewees. The unclear direction and overlapping work led to doubt about the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand and was another reason for low levels of interest in the ASEAN MRA-TP in the view of staff from University A. The government is required to provide a guideline and policy for the higher education sector to follow and apply to support the ASEAN MRA-TP.

5.5.3 The perspectives for policy at the institutional governance level

As mentioned above, the interviewees accepted the importance of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP. However, they believed that many academic activities under the internationalisation policy, i.e. joint programmes, student and staff exchanges, research collaboration and existing university policy and strategies can support ASEAN. University A has developed its working on an international dimension and has built up academic co-operation with other countries for over 20 years. In the beginning, this university firstly built up the network with other foreign universities in scientific areas, through research co-operation and entering into a memorandum of

understanding (MOU) in research collaboration in scientific areas. During that time, OHEC launched the 7th Higher Education Development Plan, which focused on the internationalisation of Thai universities. In this plan, OHEC encouraged Thai universities to create networks with foreign universities in all subjects and launched internationally collaborative taught programmes. In responding to a government policy of internationalisation, University A has strengthened the existing network in sciences, together with expanding international co-operation into the social sciences area and tourism and hospitality programmes, through many academic activities, such as the exchange of students and staff, research collaboration, offering international programmes and joint programmes.

The work on internationalisation at University A is not focused only on building co-operation in some specific areas or working with some countries. It is expected to cover all international dimensions, such as increasing the number of international programmes, setting up an international relations office, strengthening research collaboration or student and staff exchanges with foreign universities and building up co-operation with many countries and international organisations. ASEAN is also a part of this work. As one staff member commented:

“... we focus on these kinds of academic activities instead of ASEAN. We did not concern more on ASEAN. Internationalisation of university is more important and can serve ASEAN as well. We look beyond ASEAN. We focus on international standards and needs. The management team of university encourage us to strengthen the strong networking with other foreign universities through signing MOU with international partners, students and staff exchange and joint programme and research.” (Interviewee AS1)

Internationalisation plays a key role at University A, and it has become a part of policies and strategies at this university for over 20 years. The increasing number of international students, as well as the higher number of MOUs signed with other foreign universities, serve as good evidence for its efforts on internationalisation. With this solid foundation, the management team are assured that the work on international dimensions can respond and support upcoming international activities, including ASEAN. As one management staff member expressed:

“We did not formulate the policy or strategy to support the labour movement in ASEAN. The university’s vision and mission is the first priority that we need to consider. The current policies and strategies focus on the university ranking and the work as the research university in Thailand. However, in each strategy, it might have some projects or activities to support ASEAN. In my opinion, I believe that the internationalisation policy of the university can respond to ASEAN and its activities.” (Interviewee AM2)

One lecturer also added more information:

“... As we offer international programmes in tourism, we all realise that the internationalisation of university plays a vital role in our policy formulation. We have been signed many MOUs with other universities for academic cooperation. We have some international students registered in our international programmes.” (Interviewee AS3)

The success of internationalisation at University A is not only building a strong network with other foreign universities, but also enhancing the overall performance in learning and teaching, and research of this university. Teaching, academic services and research at University A were geared toward excellence to support the role of the university in the international community. For tourism and hospitality programmes, this gains more benefit from the work on internationalisation in enhancing the quality of its delivered programmes. For instance, University A expanded the networking in tourism and hospitality area which lead to the increasing number of MOUs. Student and staff exchanges in the area of tourism and hospitality have also been encouraged. The international atmosphere in the university; international outlook, internationalised curriculum, and special provision for international students, also attracts more international students in tourism and hospitality. It was proved by the increasing number of international students in University A. University A in its tourism and hospitality programmes has worked closely with one of the well-known hospitality institutes in developing its hotel management programme. Moreover, it also co-operates with a world class hotel chain in offering special classes on hotel management and recruiting its students to work as interns or working staff in the hotel chain. These efforts express the intention of University A to develop the quality of graduates in order to meet international

standards, which also cover the ASEAN standard. As one member of teaching staff mentioned:

“With our policy, we try to produce qualified tourism professionals who have comprehensive knowledge and can serve the need of both national and international labour market. In my view, our students meet the international standards. We received good feedback from businesses who select our students to work as the interns. More than 60% of our students got the job while they are interns. We believe that our students have potential to meet the requirement of international labour market. It is beyond ASEAN ... it is the international standards. Producing graduate for international community can serve ASEAN as well.” (Interviewee AS1)

English language development was widely discussed during interviews at University A. The English language proficiency of Thai graduates was a common concern of the interviewees. The problems of graduates using English included their lack of interest in English, their inability to understand English textbooks or journals and their inability to correspond and discuss in various situations with English-speaking foreigners. These problems were also reflected by employers who accepted them to work as interns. University A has recognised the importance of these problems and launched many activities with criteria to improve the English language skills of graduates. Adding English language in general education subjects and initiating many interesting activities to encourage English learning of students, such as an English clinic, English language centre have been applied. As a management staff member explained:

“One of the obstacles that we faced is English language and usage. Our students still have a problem in English communication. We thought that we must do something to improve English skills of our students. Now, we have set the criteria for the fourth-year students. They have to pass 600 scores of TOEIC or equivalence before they graduate. Moreover, we developed our curriculum to support English learning. Previously, English language was an elective subject and some of students ignored English. They choose other language such

as Chinese and Japanese. Therefore, these students cannot develop their English skills to meet the need of industries. So, we decided to develop our curriculum and forced our students to learn more on English.” (Interviewee AM1)

One lecturer added more information as:

“University A has a plan to develop English proficiency of students. English language is in general education and earn 12 credits more than the past with 9 credits. However, it is very hard to teach our students to communicate well in English within 12 credits. So, this is a tough work for our faculty.” (Interviewee AS2)

The ASEAN MRA-TP standard and curricula have been used as a guideline for reviewing University A's tourism and hospitality curriculum. The tourism and hospitality curriculum of University A is designed to meet international standards and respond to the need of the international labour market. The strength of this curriculum is research-based and includes active learning. The teaching and learning process focuses on systematic and analytical thinking through the participation of students, which is different from the focus of the ASEAN MRA-TP on practical skills. As one lecturer explained:

“If you asked me ... I have to say we are not exactly based on this standard but we will consider what skills and requirements are needed for this standard. We will add those skills to our curriculum. We focus on the needs of employers and the international labour market. Our graduates get great jobs, working in four or five star hotels, and they are successful in their careers. Most of them are now working at management level. Our students might lack some practical skills if you compare them with other universities, but our students have adaptive skills, social skills and analytical skills. We focus on these skills.” (Interviewee AS3)

However, interviewees claimed that their tourism and hospitality curricula can support the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. University A found that more than 70 percent of the curriculum can match with the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. They assured that the basic knowledge and skills required in the ASEAN MRA-TP standard were contained in their

curricula and they will adjust some content and skills lacking in their curricula. As one staff member expressed:

“... when we compare between ASEAN MRA-TP standard and our curriculum. It is not exactly 100%. ASEAN standards focuses on the practical skills which are unable to train these skills in four years of study but we can say that we cover all of ASEAN contents. We did not focus on the detail of each competency but we briefly look at what skills required in each competency, especially in bachelor degree.”

(Interviewee AS4)

In terms of teaching, interviewees from University A considered that the ASEAN MRA-TP standard put more emphasis on practical skills instead of theoretical knowledge. They have a plan to adjust their curricula by adding more necessary skills training for their students as well as strengthening co-operation with businesses for work placement. They also decided to encourage the learning of students by focusing on active learning. One lecturer explained this as:

“... our department had discussed and agreed that we should focus more on active learning than theoretical knowledge. Students should learn by themselves, learning by doing. Moreover, we, as teacher, need to develop themselves to support the change in ASEAN. Therefore, we need more training and study visits or even doing more research in the topic that related to tourism and hospitality in ASEAN”

(Interviewee AS4)

University A has its own strategy to support staff development through many academic activities, i.e. staff exchanges, joint research and skills training. Tourism and hospitality staff are included in this strategy. When the ASEAN MRA-TP standard were announced, university staff needed to understand this agreement as they had to translate the ASEAN MRA-TP principles, knowledge, skills and required competencies to their students. Participating in the ASEAN MRA-TP training and workshops, self-development and building strong co-operation with other ASEAN universities for staff exchanges were issues raised during interviews. University A had sent some of its staff to train to be master trainers of the ASEAN MRA-TP standard at national level and also had a plan to send all of its staff in tourism and hospitality

programmed to participate in this training. As one management staff member explained:

“At this point, the university support our staff to train to be ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers. We work closely with MOTS on this matter and we do plan to send as many as staff as possible to attend the training. I can see more benefit from being a master trainer. If our staff can serve as trainers at national level, it will benefit our reputation and our teaching in tourism and hospitality.” (Interviewee AM1)

Learning and training facilities were concerns raised by interviewees from University A. University A still needed more equipment for hotel training and laboratory demonstrations for tourism. Interviewees from University A mentioned that the university had allocated some budget to support the work of the department in training facilities, but it was not enough. One possible reason is that the university budget is geared to academic activities related to science subjects, as University A is rooted in scientific areas. Therefore, staff decided to spend our money earned from working on extra projects to buy some training equipment and build a training demonstration room. As one management staff member expressed.

“We do have a plan to be an ASEAN MRA-TP training centre. Hence, we have developed our laboratory to support skills training. However, our university has a good reputation in science. Budget allocation for non-science subjects might not then be sufficient. So, we decided to do project work for MOTS and spent the money earned from this project on utilities for our students to train and add to their skills. Now, we have some budget to build the tours model and buy a ticketing programme for demonstrations. We still need more money to develop our laboratory.” (Interviewee AM2)

As explained, interviewees from University A recognised the importance of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP. However, its importance is lessened by some barriers and limitations. University A put more emphasis on internationalisation and intended to foster this work to meet regional and international standards. Working on international dimensions through many academic activities as they have done for more than 20 years lays the foundation for responding to challenges in global changes. Not only in

internationalisation policy, but many existing strategies, such as work placement and internship are still applied to support the ASEAN MRA-TP. With these efforts, the internationalisation policy and university strategies, all interviewees said that they could respond well to ASEAN and ASEAN MRA-TP.

University governance and internal management factors have also affected the operations of Thai HEIs in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP. University A was recently categorized as an autonomous university. An autonomous status commits this university to freedom from state bureaucracy with more flexibility in financial management, human resources and administration. Another important change in being an autonomous university is in the form of budget allocation. An autonomous university is supported from the government through a block grant budget, operating outside of government bureaucracy. Moreover, autonomy from the Thai bureaucratic system can be a benefit for University A in terms of faster decision-making on any matters concerning academic co-operation and responding to challenges in higher educational contexts.

Freedom from state bureaucracy and flexibility in resource management are advantages that University A has as an autonomous university. These special characteristics lead to flexible work with faster and shorter process. However, being an autonomous university does not mean that the work related to the ASEAN MRA-TP will be more responsive. Interviewees from University A mentioned that the autonomy of the university did not change the way they worked in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP. After the transition to an autonomous university, the full authority of management and budget did not affect their work. It might be more flexible in the decision-making process on any matter, but, on the other hand, gaining budget approval could mean the opposite. With less direct financial support from government, University A is required to focus especially on revenue generation activity. The management team has to prioritise the academic activities that support the vision and mission of the university. Hence, the activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP are not a priority for budget approval. One staff member raised this point:

“In the view of staff, it supports the work of the management team. The budget disbursement is more flexible, but it does not mean that we receive more budget. Many people think that our work will be more

flexible but for me, we work more carefully, especially in budget approval. I think autonomy of the university is good in concept but in the real work, it depends on the university context.” (Interviewee AS3)

One management staff member added:

“One thing that is clearly seen from being an autonomous university is budget. I have to say it is harder to have budgets approved. The management team think more carefully before approving our projects or activities. We have to understand the budget allocation of this university. The university will set priorities depending on necessity. The university has its own criteria to allocate the budget. One of the criteria is the number of students and another is income. Therefore, the tourism and hospitality programme seemed not to be the first priority of this university. If you asked for my opinion of the working process after becoming an autonomous university, I think it is better.”
(Interviewee AM2)

5.5.4 Conclusion

University A is recognised as one of the top ten universities in Thailand. Its great reputation is rooted from agricultural education and science subjects. In the early stage of establishment, this university offered only science subject programmes and then expanded into social science subjects. The tourism and hospitality programme of this university was developed at the same time as the beginning of the tourism industry in Thailand and was claimed as the first tourism and hospitality programme offered at university level in Thailand. Developing its curriculum along with the growth of the tourism industry can produce an up-to-date tourism and hospitality programme for University A, which effectively supports any changes in the tourism industry.

Interviewees from University A believed that the coming of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP did not affect the operation of the university to any great degree. They suggested that policies and plans of University A were formulated to support the changes and trends in the international community, instead of focusing on a specific group of countries such as ASEAN. The policy on internationalisation of University A has developed to support academic activities related to the international dimension, which could cover the ASEAN MRA-TP. In terms of curriculum, interviewees expressed

that the common competency standards applied from the ASEAN MRA-TP seem to be a part of international tourism standards, which were used as a framework for curriculum design. However, there is some interesting content and skills required in the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. University A then applied the ASEAN MRA-TP standard as one of the frameworks for tourism and hospitality curriculum development. University A also has a plan to adjust its curriculum to focus more on practical skills to support the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Moreover, the vagueness in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand, unclear ASEAN MRA-TP principles and lack of co-operation between stakeholders were reasons for University A to view the ASEAN MRA-TP as less than significant to its business and low priority. Interviewees from University A suggested that the government sector plays an important role in driving the ASEAN MRA-TP to success. Co-operation between related government agencies, such as MOTS, MOL and OHEC, is needed to support the university in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Interviewees suggested that government agencies should work closely with each other as well as working with universities to provide them with clear direction or formulate a policy to support the ASEAN MRA-TP.

However, an important concern over the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP mentioned by interviewees concerned the English competencies of graduates. When ASEAN workers move voluntarily to work legally in Thailand under the ASEAN MRA-TP, the poor English skills of Thai graduates will be the main obstacle to finding jobs in the highly competitive labour market. University A also recognised this problem and has provided many possible ways to improve the students' English skills, such as providing special English courses, encouraging the use of English in the classroom through communication or learning resources as well as English exit exams for final year students. Moreover, expanding the internship period was another possible measure in producing graduates who meet international standards and are able to compete with other workers.

Being an autonomous university did not relate to the operation of University A in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. On one hand, flexibility in internal management shortens the period of decision-making processes and improves the performance of the university. On the other hand, freedom in budget allocation and limited budget

support from the government seems to be an obstacle in initiating any academic activities to support the ASEAN MRA-TP. Interviewees expressed that the priority of this university was towards science subjects. Therefore, academic activities of the tourism and hospitality programme seem to receive less support when compared to other academic activities in science.

5.6 Case study 2: University B

Background

University B was formed with the intention of being an institution specialising in teacher training. When first established, this university had the status of a university campus that focused on teaching and teacher education. After a long period of development, together with the government policy in expanding higher education to regional areas, University B was successfully separated from the main university and established as a government university in 1994. This university now provides various programmes over two campuses, which are in the same area, in the middle of north-eastern Thailand. A wide range of undergraduate and graduate programmes, over 160 programmes in total across 21 faculties, is offered by this university, to cover all country and local community needs.

In order to extend the idea of the government developing the quality of education in rural areas and equality in education, University B has continuously developed in both academic services and facilities to support an increasing number of students every year. More than 40,000 students have enrolled at this university, over 35,000 undergraduate students and around 10,000 graduate students. Nearly 1,500 academic staff were employed to respond to the growth of the university. From that amount, more than 700 academic staff hold a Doctorate degree. Around 500 staff graduated at Master's level and over 140 staff received Bachelor degrees.

As a public university, personnel, financing and general administration of this university had to comply entirely with the existing bureaucratic system. Any matters related to budget spent and the status of university personnel have to follow government rules and regulations. Only academic affairs and knowledge specialities are guaranteed to be free from government authority. Approving and revising curricula, offering new programmes and setting up an internal quality assurance

system are under the supervision of the University Council. Administrative matters of this university are also under the governance of its University Council, which is at the top of this university structure. It has the power and duties to control and supervise the affairs of the university in general by laying down policies for university implementation.

With the role of being a university for rural communities, University B intended to integrate features of local wisdom and knowledge within international disciplines for academic excellence. Local principles of intellectual knowledge were applied in its teaching and learning process in order to support the needs of the community, as most of the students in this university are locals. This university also commits itself to be one of the top ten universities in Thailand in providing high-standard graduates, who will represent the best manpower in the country. With these goals, University B focuses on improving the quality of graduates by strengthening the high standard of education and creating research innovations.

University B formulated its policy and strategies while recognising changing trends in national and international education. The main concept of this strategic plan was to improve its teaching and learning process. Each programme offered by this university has been designed to adapt to changing trends in the world. University B intended to produce graduates who have analytical thinking skills and adaptive skills. Moreover, this university also focused on research exploitation. Academic staff, including in the tourism and hospitality area, are encouraged to develop research and innovation to support the needs of the industry. For work on the international dimension, the internationalisation policy still plays an important role in this university. Reinforcing the strong network with other international agencies and seeking new partnerships in ASEAN areas are part of its current plan.

The tourism and hospitality programme of University B is in the faculty of tourism and hotel management, situated on the main campus. Four tourism and hotel management programmes, both in Thai and English languages, are offered in this faculty, with more than 2,500 students enrolled, including graduate students. Some essential training equipment has been provided for practical training. However, compared to the number of students, training facilities are insufficient.

University B in the faculty of tourism and hotel management intended to produce well-trained graduates who can reach international tourism standards. It focuses on strengthening academic excellence whilst developing practical skills. This faculty targeted developing its learning towards learning in the real world, combining training together with developing research and innovation to support national and regional tourism.

Themes from the data

5.6.1 The perspectives for policy at the regional governance level

Through the views of the interviewees, ASEAN provided them with many benefits, i.e. increasing the number of international students, especially students from neighbouring countries, providing a framework for curriculum development and strengthening the network with other universities in the tourism and hospitality area, but it is not important enough to affect their operations. Being a university in a border area, ASEAN seemed to be a benefit to them in strengthening its network with many universities in neighbouring countries and increasing the number of international students. University B is situated in the middle of the north-eastern region of Thailand, which is in contact with two other ASEAN member countries, Laos and Cambodia. Advantages of the location of the university is that it is convenient in commuting with fewer travel expenses and it can attract more international students from neighbouring countries. The culture similarity and the personal connection between people in this area, together with the promoting of ASEAN collaboration from the government, can serve as a key for smoother academic co-operation with other universities in border areas. As one member of the management staff expressed:

“If we look at the benefits of ASEAN, it encourages us to build a strong network with other universities in ASEAN areas as well as developing our learning activities and research. We have an advantage in the location, of course, we should grab this opportunity to have more international students from neighbouring countries. Making academic co-operation with other ASEAN universities is easier.” (Interviewee BM2)

The irrelevance between the ASEAN MRA-TP and the operation of the university was an interesting view raised by interviewees from University B. This agreement has been designed to be used on a voluntary basis and to support all workers. The workers who are interested in working in ASEAN areas have to test their

competencies for the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate. This certificate can be used as a passport to guarantee qualified tourism professionals for ASEAN. Hence, the workers can be anybody, not necessary just for university graduates. It could be used by tourism professionals who currently work or are interested in the tourism industry or other workers who want to change their career paths. As one staff member suggested:

“In my view, the ASEAN MRA-TP is not directly related to university. The ASEAN MRA-TP is an agreement on labour movement in ASEAN areas and these workers can be anyone, not only university students. They might be people who worked in the tourism and hospitality industry. Many people understand that the ASEAN MRA-TP is an important issue for Thai HEIs, but it is not exactly true. The first time when I heard about the ASEAN MRA-TP, I also thought that all graduates should have the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate but, in fact, the ASEAN MRA-TP is necessary when you decide to go to work in other ASEAN countries.” (Interviewee BS3)

Furthermore, the ASEAN MRA-TP standard can be seen as a benefit for the ASEAN tourism industry when it faces a shortage of manpower. As tourism and hospitality jobs do not require any licences for working, more job opportunities in the tourism industry are open to everyone. The ASEAN MRA-TP has, therefore, been developed to be a skill and competency standard for ASEAN tourism professionals. All non-degree workers who received an ASEAN MRA-TP certificate will then have more chances of getting a job in the ASEAN tourism industry. As one staff member suggested:

“ASEAN MRA-TP is suitable for all staff who are interested in working in the tourism industry, but they do not have a degree in tourism and hospitality. It can support hotels and tour operators when they are in the high season and they need more staff. If you graduate in the Japanese language and you have an ASEAN MRA-TP certificate, you can find it easier get a job. You can work. I think the ASEAN MRA-TP gives a clear direction in terms of the skills and competencies required for each position.” (Interviewee BS2)

For these reasons, interviewees suggested that the ASEAN MRA-TP was not of concern to their graduates because they were not interested in working in other

ASEAN countries. They believed that Thailand still has many job opportunities in the tourism industry, as Thailand is considered as one of the main tourist destinations in ASEAN. Working in their birthplaces and staying with their families, as well as the rates of pay, are more attractive factors than working in other ASEAN member countries. Moreover, the opportunity of getting promoted and moving to work outside Thailand, ASEAN and non ASEAN countries, provided by international hotel chains can be an alternative choice for Thai tourism professionals. Each hotel chain has its own criteria and way of working. Therefore, many international hotel chains have policies to promote staff who have strong performance records to work abroad in their chains without any concern for standards. As one lecturer explained:

“I have to say that our students can meet the international standards since they receive a degree in tourism and hospitality. Service skills in the hotel industry are the same but it is slightly different in some ways. Our students can work in a hotel chain and get promoted to work in other countries, depending on their performance. It can happen, it is an option. I have talked with my students and they said they did not have a problem in finding hotel jobs. There are more job opportunities in Thailand with acceptable pay and there is no reason for them to move to work in other ASEAN countries with lower or similar benefits.”

(Interviewee BS3)

Interviewees were also concerned by the increased job competition resulting from the ASEAN MRA-TP. In their view, the ASEAN MRA-TP will benefit workers from ASEAN countries to work legally in Thailand, as Thailand is one of the main tourist destinations in ASEAN. With a greater need for staff in the tourism industry, there will be more attractive job opportunities in Thailand. With a short distance from their homelands and good pay, many workers from other ASEAN countries might apply in the ASEAN MRA-TP and come to work in Thailand. The ASEAN MRA-TP can then be another channel for them in obtaining work authorisation in Thailand. As one staff member added:

“From my point of view, I think Thai workers might not be interested in working in ASEAN countries. As said, Thailand is still the main touristic place in ASEAN. We can work all the year, both in high and low season.

The benefit is better. These advantages can attract both Thai and other ASEAN member countries labours. I think this is one of the reasons that Thai labours still work in Thailand. However, ASEAN MRA-TP did not help Thai labour to move to work in ASEAN, on the contrary, it paves the way for ASEAN labours to work legally in Thailand.” (Interviewee BS5)

As explained above, interviewees did not deny the benefits of ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP. However, these benefits were not strong enough for them to initiate any particular academic activities to support them. The condition of non-enforcement of the ASEAN MRA-TP also decreased the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

5.6.2 The perspectives for policy at the national governance level

The vagueness of the responsible agency for the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand was raised by interviewees. The problem of overlapping work between related government agencies also needs to be clarified. The lack of co-operation between the work of MOTS and MOL was mentioned during the interviews. With a role assigned by the government, MOTS is the main agency responsible for the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP, including accreditation of the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate. However, MOL still provides training courses for hotel services, which were designed to conform to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. These courses focused on improving practical skills needed for the hotel business and tourism industry. They also emphasised the similar competency standards of the ASEAN MRA-TP, core competencies, generic competencies and functional competencies. All candidates who passed the ASEAN MRA-TP test will receive certificates to prove that they were qualified workers for these job titles.

Both MOTS and MOL also provided similar skills training courses for the ASEAN MRA-TP, which could be duplicated for workers who are interested in working in the tourism industry, both in Thailand and abroad, as the certificate granted by MOTS and MOL are slightly different in terms of usage. The MOTS certificate is designed to directly support the ASEAN MRA-TP. It can guarantee that the workers are qualified ASEAN tourism professionals. On the other hand, the MOL certificate is well-known in the Thai tourism industry. It can be seen as a benefit for candidates when they apply for jobs in Thailand. Moreover, it can be used as an official document to support workers when

they would like to work outside Thailand. This overlapping work also affected the work of educational institutions on skills training co-operation. Therefore, interviewees from University B suggested that both ministries and other stakeholders who work on tourism and hospitality certificates should co-operate and work together in order to avoid confusion.

“Now, MOTS and MOL are working on ASEAN MRA-TP skills training. It is not clear who will be the main responsible agency. It should be MOTS, I know, MOTS plays a leading role in this matter. However, who will be the main contact agency when we are faced with some problem related to the ASEAN MRA-TP and skills training? Which agencies do I need to contact, MOTS, MOL or other tourism and hotel organisations in Thailand? I need the clarification” (Interviewee BS6)

A staff shared her own experience on this matter:

“I have a chance to train in some tourism skills with The Federation of Thai industries and I also receive a certificate for working both inside and outside Thailand. Not only this agency, but other related agencies such as MOL also offer a certificate for workers who passed the training. These certificates can be used in the same way, proof of qualified workers. I have talked with some officers in these agencies and asked them why they offer similar training programmes as other agencies and also provide a similar certificate. They said that it depends on the worker which certificate they need. In my opinion, it is not clear for us as workers. We have to pay a lot of money to enrol on these courses with the same content and receive many certificates. We, the government and stakeholders, need to work closely and co-operate with other agencies to avoid this overlapping work.” (Interviewee BS4)

Moreover, interviewees from University B suggested that broadcasting more about ASEAN MRA-TP news and activities is needed and this is the direct responsibility of the government. In the past few years, the Thai government was interested in preparing people for being part of the ASEAN population. It focused on giving basic background information of AEC and its effects toward Thai societies. The details of agreements of the freer movement of goods and people between ASEAN countries has been heavily

promoted by the Thai government, however, the information on these agreements was spread only among a small group of people who worked in related areas. Interviewees from University B expressed that some of their students did not clearly understand about the process of obtaining the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate or the benefits gained from this certificate. Then, University B, together with MOTS, gave a special lecturer on the ASEAN MRA-TP for their students and other interested people. As one management staff member explained:

“I think awareness of the ASEAN labour movement is important. Our university offers all eight programmes related to the ASEAN MRA and only students from eight faculties are concerned with and aware of the challenge of ASEAN and the bigger labour market. Other students might think that it is too much for them to achieve. No. It is not that much to achieve. They have to know what is waiting for them in the labour market. They have to know about their opportunities and what they need to develop. We need to work more on publicity. We need to build awareness of the effect of the labour movement.” (Interviewee BM3)

5.6.3 The perspectives for policy at the institutional governance level

Interviewees from University B believed that their university was well prepared for challenges of the ASEAN MRA-TP through its work on internationalisation in the university. University B has prepared itself for being a university for international students for over 20 years by improving the infrastructure and facilities to support the enrolment of international students from many countries, including ASEAN member countries. It also provides many English-taught programmes in different fields, including tourism and hospitality. University B has put more emphasis on co-operation with foreign universities through the signing of MOUs in many fields of interest. Many academic activities, such as student and staff exchanges, joint programmes and work placement programmes, have been developed in order to strengthen the internationalisation goals of the university. University B expected that its work on internationalisation could raise the quality of education and graduates. As one management staff member explained:

“... I understand that we are now in the ASEAN community. I think we have prepared well for this challenge. We did not have any changes in our university. Everything is still the same. We still focus on internationalisation of the university. We still support student exchange and work placements abroad because we need to produce quality graduates who can meet the need of labour markets and they can easily get jobs.” (Interviewee BM1)

Another lecturer commented on this point:

“The university worked hard on internationalisation of the university. We focus on improving English and technology skills of our students. We focus more on student exchanges and work placements. We sent our students to train with an institute in Malaysia. We tried to send our students to work abroad so they will understand real working life and the requirements of the real world labour market.” (Interviewee BS4)

A member of senior management staff added more information on academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella as:

“We worked hard on the internationalisation of the university. We have MOUs with other ASEAN universities in the field of tourism and hospitality. Our university strongly supports student exchanges. So, we have a lot of activities for student and staff exchanges and short-term training. Moreover, we have an advantage on location, we are now recruiting more ASEAN students to study with us. We have many international students from our neighbouring countries, which strengthens the internationalisation goals of the university.” (Interviewee BM3)

Interviewees also suggested that being an ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre was also another goal that University B needs to achieve. University B used to be appointed by MOTS to join in this project, together with another six universities, however, this project was rejected due to unspecified reasons. With the role of this centre in promoting MOTS activities in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP and working as the co-operation centre of MOTS in the north-eastern area, this could strengthen the

strong reputation of university and also attract more students to study in its tourism and hospitality programme. As one senior staff member explained:

“For the last few years, we have planned to serve as an ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre. We had signed MOUs with MOTS but there is a huge change in MOTS and this project was dropped. For now, we are also interested in being an ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre and we applied for it. I think it is a good way for us to promote our university and our curriculum through being an ASEAN MRA-TP representative. It shows that we are ready. Moreover, academic services in the tourism and hospitality area are also in our plan.” (Interviewee BS4)

English usage of students was still the main concern of interviewees from University B when discussing areas of improvement and something to work on in order to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP. As most of the students in University B were likely to be local students, the quality of input and some characteristics of local students were raised as main obstacles to English language improvement. In Thailand, there is a noticeable difference in the quality of education delivered to students in various areas. A lack of learning materials and facilities and a lack of expertise in various subjects, especially English, are found in many public high schools in rural areas. Together with low-income families, the opportunity to develop English skills of local students is quite low when compared to students in big cities. Moreover, a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, main characteristics of local students, were reported as problems for students in University B. One management staff member explained this situation as detailed:

“As you might notice, our university is in the countryside, which is definitely different from a university in a city in terms of quality of students. We have to accept the truth that our students do not have a good basic use of English. Not only having the problem of basic skills of English, shyness and fear of mistakes are the problems of our students. So, it is very hard for us to develop their English skills in only four years they stay with us.” (Interviewee BM1)

With an understanding of the English usage problems of students and recognising the role of English in working life, University B then added English skills into the learning process through many classroom activities. Using English as the medium language of

formal instruction, discussing in English or providing more English articles and journals for seminars were measures applied to encourage English usage of students. English tutorial classes have also been provided as options to improve students' English skills. Moreover, all fourth-year students are required to pass an English exit exam before graduation. As one senior lecturer explained:

“ We understand that our students still have a problem in English language. This is the main obstacle for them when they work as interns in hotels or with tour operators. Our university realises the importance of English as well as another third language. We make up English tutorial classes for free. We have an exit exam for fourth-year students. I try to encourage them to learn more in English, at least then they can communicate with customers and their bosses. The skill is really important, not only professional skills but language skills are also necessary.” (Interviewee BS3)

Interviewees claimed that their tourism and hospitality curriculum had been designed to meet international standards. Therefore, after comparing with the ASEAN MRA-TP standard, more than 70 percent of the content in their tourism and hospitality curriculum related to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. There are some competencies required in this standard that need to be adjusted. However, the ASEAN MRA-TP standard is considered to be one of the concerning factors, apart from the needs of the labour market and international standards, when designing or developing University B's curriculum. A senior management member of staff expressed this issue during the interview:

“Before the ASEAN MRA-TP was launched, we believed that our curriculum met international standards and then also can serve the ASEAN MRA-TP as well. After reviewing the ASEAN MRA-TP standard and requirements, I can say, our curriculum can meet them. There is some room to develop. However, we will study more of the ASEAN MRA-TP standard when we are in the curriculum development process. We will apply the ASEAN MRA-TP to our curriculum.” (Interviewee BM1)

A lecturer involved in developing the tourism and hospitality curriculum of University B also supported the view of management staff:

“In fact, the standards and content we teach are related to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. We compared them and found that more than 70 percent of our curriculum can meet this standard. However, some content and competencies still need to be adjusted and we need to build more awareness on the ASEAN MRA-TP in our students.”

(Interviewee BM3)

The ideas of preserving local wisdom and improving the quality of life for people in the area have been used as a guideline for designing the curriculum of University B. The tourism and hospitality programme of University B was then designed to increase students' job opportunities. It focuses on a working basis and skills training, together with local wisdom and cultural learning, in order to produce graduates who are ready to work and able to serve the economic needs in their areas. With the intention of improving the quality of community, the ASEAN MRA-TP has less importance for the university. Representatives from the tourism and hotel business and local organisations have also participated in the process of curriculum design in terms of providing useful information on expectations of employers towards graduates. Moreover, University B decided to extend the internship period from three to five months in order to strengthen the working skills of graduates. As one senior lecturer, who was the university representative in criticising the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum, explained:

“our curriculum will focus on operational skills. We have recently developed our curriculum by adding some information on cultural diversity into our curriculum and building a strong attitude towards jobs in the service industry. We have to discuss expectations, needs and requirements of businesses and we have to consider international standards when we design our curriculum. I think our curriculum can meet the ASEAN MRA-TP standard, but we still need to strengthen professional skills of our students. For this reason, we decided to develop our curriculum by changing the internship period, three months to five months, to give our students more time to develop their working skills.” (Interviewee BS2)

Staff development was considered an important activity for interviewees. They accepted that they needed to improve themselves in terms of teaching styles and up-

to-date knowledge about the ASEAN MRA-TP in order to produce qualified graduates to meet the requirements of international labour markets as well as the ASEAN labour market. University B strongly supports the development of staff in order to prepare themselves for the ASEAN MRA-TP. Awareness of the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP has led staff of University B to participate in many kinds of training opportunities, such as tourism and hospitality skills training, the ASEAN MRA-TP workshop and teaching strategies. Staff exchange with other foreign university staff under MOU, which is a useful option for learning and discussion new teaching approaches. Moreover, University B has also planned to recruit new lecturers who have direct experience of working in the hotel and tourism industry in order to share real practices with their graduates. One lecturer who had experience of a staff exchange gave her view:

“Our university signed MOUs with many foreign universities and we use that benefit in term of staff exchange. I have a chance to visit many universities to discuss and exchange our experiences toward learning and teaching. We have learned cultural diversity and new teaching approaches and exchanged our resources, which is good for us because we have to improve our teaching skills and adapt our teaching style to support our competency-based curriculum. It should start from us.” (Interviewee BS2)

A senior lecturer supported the above concepts by strengthening the importance of staff development as:

“In my personal view, I think we need to teach our students to be qualified workers. That is our problem. We have to think what the best way to teach them is. We have to plan and prepare ourselves first. We have to develop ourselves. We have to change the way of teaching. We need to focus more on practical work. We need to share real experiences with our students to prepare them. I know that our faculty has a plan to recruit a new lecturer who has direct experience in the tourism industry. I think this will help us in sharing experience about the real-world situation and real working life.” (Interviewee BS3)

With the intention of improving the practical skills of graduates, interviewees expressed the view that University B still lacked a training and demonstration room and some

hotel equipment to train its students. The main reason behind this problem was that the faculty did not have enough budget to support it. With the limited budget received in each fiscal year, building a simulation and demonstration room in tourism is still only at a planning stage. Insufficient training equipment in the hotel area was also raised by interviewees. Some electronic programmes used in the hotel and travel business, i.e. hotel booking programmes or airline ticketing programmes, are also necessary for training students. This equipment, namely a training room, hotel utility functions and electronic programmes, will be useful materials for students to have a better understanding of the real working process and make them ready for work after graduation. As one lecturer expressed this problem:

“Because the ASEAN MRA-TP focuses on operational work, skills training is really important. I think we have an outstanding curriculum. Our graduates have international skills and knowledge but in terms of practical skills, we need to improve. We did not have enough budget to build a demonstration room or buy more training equipment. The best thing we can do is to demonstrate how to use any hotel equipment and ask students to practise in groups.” (Interviewee BS1)

In the view of interviewees, the status of public universities or government universities has little impact on the operation of University B towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. Being a public university in Thailand means that the government takes full responsibility for the management of public universities, which includes budget, rules and regulations, and staff management. However, a budget supported from the government creates a problem with budget allocation. A large part of the budget has been spent on building construction and the rest was divided between all faculties. Moreover, a university under government control comes with strict rules and regulations and long decision-making processes, together with many documents to manage. These disadvantages lead to the delay of the operations of the university. One management staff member from University B suggested this point:

“The advantage of being a public university is the government support in terms of budget, but the small amount of budget is claimed as a disadvantage. Actually, the university will receive a large budget, but it will be reserved for construction. The rest is for us, but the university will divide it by priority areas, or areas that can support the national

development plan. Slowing the decision-making process is also a matter for consideration. We all know that the work of the government is slow because it deals with a lot of documents. It might lead to the delay in our work when deciding to arrange some projects.” (Interviewee BM1)

However, being a public university can build more trust when asking for co-operation from other agencies, both public and private. The reputation of a government agency can reduce the hesitation of partners when making an agreement or developing a joint project. It can guarantee and assure the credibility of the university. As a government agency, the university shares the same rules and regulations that were convenient for it when initiating a new project. As one staff member expressed:

“I think the recognition of a university as a part of government can build trust for other stakeholders. They believe that the government can guarantee the success of the project. I have had a chance to discuss this with some government agencies and they said that working with other government agencies is easier because they all know the limitations of government rules and regulations and they can follow it without hesitation.” (Interviewee BS1)

5.6.4 Conclusion

University B has a good reputation of being a university for the community. The establishment of this university resulting from government policy on expanding higher education to rural areas provided benefits for both locals and community. Many local students have good opportunities to participate in higher education in their area. Tourism and hospitality programmes of this university also attract many students from both inside and outside the area. The credibility of the faculty and the good feedback about the graduates leads it to have one of the most popular tourism and hospitality programmes in Thailand, proved by the higher number of enrolled students. Therefore, University B is concerned about changes in the tourism industry.

Interviewees from University B showed their recognition of the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP, but it did not have a strong effect on the operations of University B. Like many universities, University B worked on the internationalisation of the university for over 20 years and believed that this policy could also support the effect of ASEAN integration as well as the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, this university did

not formulate any new policy to support ASEAN or even the ASEAN MRA-TP, only being concerned with new challenges. The academic activities carried out under the internationalisation policy, such as building networks with other universities, or staff and student exchanges, are still continuing by focusing more on the tourism area. The impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP showed in the curriculum. Although more than 70 percent of the content of the tourism and hotel management curriculum seems to correlate to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard, University B still has plans to develop its curriculum by using the ASEAN MRA-TP standard as a framework. Extending the internship period from three months to five months is also the main strategy in developing its curriculum when it realised that the ASEAN MRA-TP standard focused on operational skills.

However, interviewees from University B suggested that the ASEAN MRA-TP might not directly impact on the graduates or university. The ASEAN MRA-TP is designed to refine qualified tourism professionals who seek employment in the ASEAN tourism industry. Hence, it is not required for all Thai students and graduates, only the ones who intend to work in other ASEAN countries. Moreover, interviewees also added that Thailand now faces a problem of the co-ordination of government agencies in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. The leading agency in this issue needs to be identified. Reducing overlapping work between ASEAN MRA-TP stakeholders is also a commitment for the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. Therefore, interviewees suggested that the clear direction in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP and the link between universities and the ASEAN MRA-TP are factors that urgently need to be clarified. The government sector then becomes the vital factor in solving the problem of this vagueness.

Another concern related to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP is the low competence in English of Thai graduates. Interviewees accepted that Thai graduates and students urgently need to improve their English skills and the university should do its best to help them. Many activities such as English exit exams, extra English and training courses and more English learning resources have been used to improve the students' English skills.

Operating under bureaucratic norms did not affect any activities in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP. There was no privilege or special agreement from the government

for this public university. Moreover, the limited budget and the long working process with complicated government rules and regulations seemed to be an obstacle for University B. Nevertheless, interviewees expressed that the credibility of being a public university could make their work easier in building co-operation with other foreign agencies and universities.

5.7 Case study 3: University C

Background

University C is recognised as a specialised university in tourism and hospitality education in Thailand. This university was established in 1993, having a strong bond with the most popular Thai hotel chain, when Thailand was faced with the shortage of skilled tourism professionals at an operational level. The intention of the university founder was to serve as a new option for tourism and hospitality education in Thailand, focusing more on skills training. In the beginning, this university offered two diploma programmes, while other programmes at university level were provided in 1996. For over 40 years in the centre of Bangkok, this university has developed its academic services and learning facilities on the main campus to support the needs of staffing in the tourism business. Despite the fact that the small space of the main campus gives limits to expanding its academic services, the second campus in a nearby city can fulfil its intention of producing qualified graduates to support the growing tourism market around the world.

University C offered ten programmes at university level, for example in hotel and resort management, tourism management, culinary arts and restaurant management, and service innovation in the tourism and hotel business. Although this university offers particular programmes, its academic excellence, together with the real experience training and having close relationships with the hotel business, can attract more than 3,000 students to undergraduate and graduate programmes. Nearly 160 academic staff are employed, with nearly ten Doctorate lecturers and more than a hundred Master's degree lecturers. All employed lecturers are required to have direct experience of working in the hotel and tourism business, as this university focuses on producing skilled graduates who can quickly work in the tourism business.

This university was established by the business sector as a private university. It has the right to provide higher education services equivalent to public universities, but it has no

right to receive a budget allocation from the government. The budget needed to support the institutional operations comes from its own revenue. With its status, this university has full autonomy. The government can only monitor or evaluate its quality and performance. Like other universities, the University Council plays an important role in governing and managing this university. The Chair of the University Council for the private university is proposed by the licensee and appointed by the Minister of Education. Budget administration and personnel administration are under the authority of the University Council. Any matters related to academic administration are also required to be handled by the University Council. However, the academic performance of this type of university should be in line with the policies on academic standards of OHEC.

As a specialised university, University C sees itself to be one of the top three universities in providing education and training for the service industry, both nationally and internationally. Its main goal is to produce skilled and experienced graduates with experience of the real world to respond to the high demands of the hospitality business. Moreover, University C also develops its learning management to support the changing contexts in the service industry by extending its collaborative partnership with foreign universities.

Recognising the importance of experience in the hospitality business, University C focuses on real-world experiential learning through interdisciplinary programmes. It also emphasises the learning process gained from longer work placement periods, which form part of its offered programmes. Apart from an internship programme, lecturers must have direct experience in working in the hotel and tourism business. The most important criteria for University C in recruiting its academic staff is about experience. All teaching staff should have working experience in the service industry. Exchanging knowledge and experience with students through classroom activities is also required for academic staff in this university. Moreover, full learning facilities are provided in this university. In order to strengthen the role of University C in producing skilled graduates, students are obliged to work hard in skills training, together with intense theoretical learning. A fully equipped training classes for hotel tasks and a large training kitchen have been built to reinforce skills training for students. Apart from these laboratories, University C also provides a coffee shop and restaurant for students to train and work in real-life situations.

In terms of academic services, University C offers culinary short course training to third parties with an interest in working in the hotel and restaurant business. It also works

closely with many government agencies in training for hotel and culinary work. With its long reputation and excellence in hotel education, University C has been appointed to work as a skills testing centre for hotel professionals for people who intend to work in other countries.

Themes from the data

5.7.1 The perspectives for policy at the regional governance level

From the standpoints of interviewees, ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP did not have a strong effect on the work of the university. Working as a specialised university helps University C in shaping its direction and strategies to respond to any challenging phenomenon related to tourism and hospitality. With the benefit of being a specialised university, the narrow discipline offered by University C leads to a clear direction in developing its university to being the leading university in the service industry in Thailand. University C has worked hard to develop itself to support international requirements. Therefore, the work of this university is beyond ASEAN. As one senior lecturer suggested:

“Actually, we have worked beyond ASEAN for such a long time. ASEAN comes later, and we think we might need to follow the trend. We have looked beyond ASEAN for a while. We seek co-operation with other agencies in the hotel and tourism area. We try to set our standards to serve the international labour market, not only ASEAN.” (Interviewee CM1)

Moreover, ASEAN countries are not preferred working places for University C’s graduates. Interviewees expressed that the job-seeking trends of their graduates are to start their own businesses and work outside Thailand. Because of it being a private and specialised university, most of the students in University C have strong intentions to work in the tourism and hotel industry. These students have full support from their families. Apart from running their own businesses, working abroad and travel or internship programmes are interesting options for them. The United States of America and European countries are their target countries because of reasonable rates of pay and the chance of practising English skills with native speakers. ASEAN, therefore, is not an attractive workplace for them when compared to the opportunities gained in these developed countries. One management staff member who worked closely with students in the university addressed this point:

“I talked with them, our students, I shared my working experience with them and asked them about their futures. Surprisingly, they would love

to start their own businesses, even if in a small way. They are interested in working outside Thailand. Work and travel programmes are their preferred options. They want to gain new experiences in many developed countries such as the USA and European countries. I told them that ASEAN tourism is continuously growing and there is also the need for staffing to support this. This is a good chance for them.”
(Interviewee CM3)

Another lecturer supported the idea of working outside ASEAN:

“ASEAN is not the target countries for our students because they do not know what they can do in ASEAN. In terms of tourism and hospitality jobs, Thailand is in a good position for the tourism industry, and there are many jobs for them. Moreover, many ASEAN workers are better than Thai workers in English skills. Our students do love to go to work in Europe or the USA. In my view, the pay is the most important reason for our students to decide which countries are good for them. If they move to work in ASEAN, they might not earn much money, compared to Thailand. On the other hand, they can earn much money when they work in the USA or European countries. Practising English skills with native speakers is also an added advantage for them if they work outside ASEAN.” (Interviewee CS4)

The lower impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on the work of University C was also suggested by the interviewees, even if it can provide both advantages and disadvantages. As a specialised university in tourism and hospitality, interviewees from University C believed that the ASEAN MRA-TP would be a new challenge for them and their graduates. The ASEAN MRA-TP in their view can provide a plausible future scenario of the ASEAN tourism industry in terms of a common competency standard for ASEAN tourism professionals and the movement of labour to leading countries in the tourism industry. They suggested that this challenge will guide them in the framework for curriculum development, learning and the teaching process, to cover all skills and content required for the ASEAN labour market. At the same time, their graduates are expected to be faced with the highly competitive labour market, as Thailand is one of the leading countries in ASEAN tourism. As one senior staff member expressed, who had the experience of working and teaching in the hotel business for over ten years:

“The ASEAN MRA-TP can be used as a guideline for us to know the requirements of the ASEAN labour market, and we will know which content is needed for our students. It is good to have clear

requirements for working in the ASEAN tourism industry. It can help us to shape the direction for future development. It can also attract some skilled workers from ASEAN countries to work in Thailand, which is good for us in developing ourselves.” (Interviewee CS1)

A senior manager also suggested that the movement of ASEAN tourism professionals to Thailand can support economic growth in Thailand:

“Thailand will gain more benefits from the ASEAN MRA-TP, no matter what. Thai workers will move to work in ASEAN, or ASEAN workers will come to work in Thailand, I see the benefits. I think ASEAN workers are like tourists who spend money in our country, but we have to be concerned about the multicultural problem. I think competitiveness is good for the Thai people. They will be full of enthusiastic people when they face a challenge and compete in the job seeking. I think that is good for them.” (Interviewee CM3)

The disadvantage of the ASEAN MRA-TP is shown in the form of job- seeking when Thai workers have limited English competency. Before the ASEAN MRA-TP was signed, many non-Thai workers with interest in working in Thailand faced the obstacle of work permits and legal documents and processes, which led to a small number of ASEAN tourism professionals in Thailand. Therefore, it is expected that many ASEAN tourism professionals will move to work in the Thai tourism industry after the ASEAN MRA-TP is launched. These high-potential workers will then have more opportunity to get a job. One lecturer who had an experience of working in the hotel business expressed her views:

“I believe that many people will agree with me on the disadvantage of the ASEAN MRA-TP towards Thai workers. I strongly believe that other ASEAN workers will come to work in Thailand. With poor English skills and the value of our graduates, Thai workers might face obstacles in job seeking.” (Interviewee CS2)

On the challenges of obtaining gainful employment for Thai staff, one management staff member suggested:

“I am concerned about unskilled labour in Thailand. Thai skilled labour will face a problem in seeking jobs because we will have other ASEAN workers who will come to work in Thailand. These workers have good attitudes towards work and are diligent, which is the opposite of Thai workers. It might be rude, but it is a fact about Thai workers.” (Interviewee CM4)

Moreover, interviewees from University C discussed the possibility of applying the ASEAN MRA-TP in the tourism industry in terms of the acceptance of the ASEAN MRA-TP standard and the movement of skilled labour in the near future. As a specialised university, University C put more emphasis on producing graduates to serve the international labour market and meet international standards. The ASEAN MRA-TP standard, in the view of University C's interviewees, is a part of international standards. In addition, some competencies and content of the ASEAN MRA-TP are also not suitable for Thailand, i.e. instructions in preparing some kind of special meat before serving. In terms of implementation, Interviewees C suggested that hotel and tour operators in Thailand should have a better understanding of the ASEAN MRA-TP and be ready to apply it. The co-operation from both government agencies and the private sector is essential for this stage. Inevitably, it might take time to have a common understanding on this point. Therefore, the ASEAN MRA-TP might not happen in the near future, and it could take some time to implement ASEAN *fully*. As one lecturer mentioned:

“We have to think about the content of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Some parts might not be suitable for the Thailand context. We have to think about many internal procedures in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. Is there any law to support the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate? Are any tour operators and hotel businesses aware of this standard? From now, I do not see any possibility of labour movement under the ASEAN MRA-TP. It might take time to happen.” (Interviewee CS7)

Interviewees from University C also raised the point of the readiness of each ASEAN country in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. There are differences between ASEAN member countries, such as development gaps, different culture and different language. The different levels of the development of the tourism industry might lead to different levels of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation. One management staff member expressed this point:

“Personally, the labour movement might not happen in the next ten years because there is an incompatibility in working on the ASEAN MRA-TP. Indonesia is the main country that supports this agreement. How about other countries? The important thing ... there are no countries that are stable in both economic and political issues. The nature of a developing country is to put more emphasis on politics and protect its benefits. I think we are not ready.” (Interviewee CM1)

5.7.2 The perspectives for policy at the national governance level

Policies and plans in the government sector are vital factors in shaping the role and direction of private universities when responding to any specific matters such as the ASEAN MRA-TP. The operation of a private university such as University C is not only an option in providing good education in tourism and hospitality but also running its own business, as in any other private company. Its operations are conducted for its benefit and survival, together with fulfilling a high demand for quality graduates in tourism and hospitality. Hence, its direction and policies might not directly support government needs or policies. The government sector, in the view of University C's interviewees, should clearly declare its direction or policies towards the ASEAN MRA-TP in order to help Thai universities follow and respond to its needs. As a management staff member suggested:

"In my view, the government should decide whether the ASEAN MRA-TP is important. If there are laws or orders from the government, universities will follow and add the ASEAN MRA-TP standard to their curriculum." (Interviewee CM4)

One senior lecturer also supported the role of the government sector in leading Thai universities, especially in private universities, to the right way in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP:

"Government or OHEC is the key factor to shape our direction. They have to order what they need from us, and we will follow because we, a private university, do not know if what we do can support the government policy or not. We are a business, and the way we work is to support ourselves. We need a clear direction from the government." (Interviewee CS7)

While government policy is a crucial factor influencing the direction of University C's operations toward the ASEAN MRA-TP, the political situation becomes an obstacle to the university in working with the government and affects its operations in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The changes in government cabinet and policies in the past few years have affected the preparation of University C to serve as an ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre. Since the ASEAN MRA-TP agreement was signed, this university has prepared itself to be a co-operation centre by developing its campus to support the training courses, providing the ASEAN MRA-TP knowledge to students and staff and also working closely with MOTS in terms of government requirements and legal documents. However, the changes in the internal management of MOTS has interrupted this progress. The mentioned problem means that the conflict of politics leads to the discontinuity of government policy, which can

have a strong effect in working with the government. Management staff who worked on establishing the ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre explained this situation:

“We are interested in serving as an ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre in Thailand. We have worked on this matter for nearly four years. We went to the William Angliss Institute for a study visit and exchanged some knowledge on the ASEAN MRA-TP, and we work hard with MOTS. Unfortunately, the government has changed, and we are lost now. After the change to the government cabinet and the internal management of MOTS, our agreement with MOTS was withdrawn, and we have nothing.” (Interviewee CM3)

Another senior member of management staff who worked closely with MOTS supported this problem as detail:

“We have had the experience of working with the government under unstable conditions. I would say that it reflects the political problems in Thailand. Our government cabinet was frequently changed, and this has affected policy formulation and implementation. In the beginning, we signed MOUs with MOTS to work as an ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre. After the government changes, everything has gone, and we do not work as a co-operation centre. Presently, this government is concerned about ASEAN MRA-TP and works hard on this matter. However, if the government cabinet has to change in the next few years, I cannot imagine what will happen if the new government will not continue to support the ASEAN MRA-TP.” (Interviewee CM4)

Moreover, a lack of co-operation between government agencies and the lack of clarity about the responsible agency for the ASEAN MRA-TP were raised during the interviews as factors that might lead to the unsuccessful implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. Like other interviewees from other universities, interviewees from University C revealed that the overlapping work between agencies that are responsible for the professional tourism qualification framework, such as MOTS, MOL or Thailand Professional Qualification Institute leads to the bewilderment of universities in terms of producing graduates to meet these requirements. Each government agency works on its own and sometimes will not share its information with other government agencies. Therefore, a co-ordinator in a body such as OHEC may be asked to work together with stakeholders for the clarification of tourism qualifications and standards as well as fulfilling their roles and responsibilities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP. A senior

management staff member who worked closely with MOTS and other government agencies suggested this point as detailed:

“The government should immediately work on who will be the main agency with responsibility for the ASEAN MRA-TP. I believe that it will be MOTS. How about other agencies? We have many agencies who work on the qualifications and standards of careers in the area of tourism and hospitality, like MOL and the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute. How are they different? We need the clarification. Moreover, I think MOTS might need to work more closely with universities in terms of the ASEAN MRA-TP standard to design tests. If that test does not work, you will not know who meets the requirement. Another point, there are no laws or budget to support the work of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. The government should clarify this point, as well.” (Interviewee CM1)

A senior lecturer supported this point by adding in an experienced view towards the work of government agencies as detailed:

“I think each stakeholder agency works on its own and they do not share their information or even work together. It is unclear for us as we have to follow the government. I think OHEC should work together with MOTS about qualifications and standards and make it clear for us. These two points are important and need to be moving in the same direction.” (Interviewee CS4)

5.7.3 The perspectives for policy at the institutional governance level

Interviewees of University C believed that the development of this university in order to meet the international standards could respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Many academic activities under international co-operation can reassure the interviewees that their graduates are qualified labour who can meet the requirements of international labour markets. As one senior lecturer suggested:

“We prepare ourselves for serving the international labour market. We focus on the competencies and skills required for work, and our students should be able to work after they graduate. We work hard in international co-operation. We have many foreign partners that are leading institutions in hospitality around the world. We look for international standards, which we believe can serve all standards and requirements.” (Interviewee CS4)

Another short-term goal of University C is being the ASEAN MRA-TP training and testing centre. After changing the agreement between MOTS and University C in being the ASEAN MRA-TP co-operation centre, this university was still working closely with MOTS and nominated itself to serve as an ASEAN MRA-TP training and testing centre in Thailand. Together with experience in being a testing centre in the hospitality area for many agencies, University C prepared itself by working closely with MOTS in translating the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and sending academic staff to train to be ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers and strengthening academic co-operation with other foreign universities. Moreover, University C also provides short courses, training in Thai cooking and kitchen skills. Interviewees from University C expressed that these activities can support the role of the university in being a leading university in tourism and hospitality in Thailand and Asia while strengthening its role as one of the best options as it serves as an ASEAN MRA-TP training and testing centre in Thailand. One management staff member suggested.

“We used to be a national skills’ standard testing centre for MOL and the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute. For MOTS, we sent our staff to train as master trainers, and at the end, we would like to serve as an ASEAN MRA-TP training and testing centre. We sent the request letter to MOTS and asked for this possibility. We were not more concerned about the benefit that we will gain. We just want to work for our country, and it might be good for our students and staff.” (Interviewee CM4)

English language development is still an important issue, and it requires clear strategies to respond to this. Like other universities, interviewees from University C expressed their anxiety about the English competencies of their students and mentioned that this critical problem urgently needs to improve. The main language problem of University C’s students is reported as a lack of confidence in their English skills. Feeling shy in their pronunciation and wrong grammar usage are the main obstacles for them to communicate in English. Moreover, a lack of motivation in using English is also an issue for University C’s students, especially students in the Thai programme. As University C offered both Thai and English programmes, interviewees revealed that students on the Thai programme seemed to have more English problems than students in the English programme. One reason to explain this situation is the lack of the means to address it. Students on the Thai programme might not recognise the importance of English during their study. They might then lack interest in practising or using English. Conversely, students who studied on the English programme are automatically forced to use English all the time. Therefore, the level of awareness of the importance of English and the

motivation of both groups of students are different, which resulted in the ability to improve their English skills. As one lecturer explained:

“Talk about the main problem, English competencies. We offered both Thai and English programmes. Of course, some of the students who study on the Thai programme are having a problem in English usage when compared to others from the English programme. I think they understand, but they cannot communicate. Moreover, students in the Thai programme have a bad attitude towards English. They feel that they cannot communicate in English, and they do not even try to communicate. This is a disaster.” (Interviewee CS7)

Measures related to improving English competencies of students have been developed by University C when it recognised that the English problem would affect their reputation of producing high-standard graduates in tourism and hospitality. Its measures are continuously planned, starting from the first day of being University C’s students. All new students have to pass an English test before they register. If they fail, they have to enrol on an intensive English course or gain other English skills. Later, all students, both in Thai and English programmes, are encouraged to use English in the classroom. They have to practise all four skills of English, namely reading, writing, listening and speaking, with their lecturer during class. English journals, textbooks and even class presentations of their work using English are used as learning materials. Finally, all students must pass an English exam before the internship project, which is compulsory for all students. If they fail, they have to attend extra classes offered by the university and test again. As a member of senior management staff explained:

“We have to accept the truth that our students are poor in English. Intending to be one of the top three tourism and hospitality universities in Asia, we work hard on English usage. Our students have to pass an English test; if not, they have to enrol for intensive English and other English skills. Our students will learn more than basic English for everyday use. We teach them the technical terms that are necessary for their working lives. We encourage them to use English in the classroom and try to communicate with them in English. So, they will feel comfortable to speak English.” (Interviewee CM4)

One senior lecturer whose work as related to the internship project added more on the English improvement plan:

“Our students are shy about speaking English. I think they understand what I say, but they do not know how to reply. At the same time, students from other ASEAN countries can speak English very well. They have to use English when they work; therefore, we decide to test them. Every student who will work for an internship has to pass the English exit exam. If they do not pass this exam, they will not be able to work as interns. That is mean, they might not graduate because the internship project is compulsory.” (Interviewee CS4)

When the ASEAN MRA-TP standard comes as a new challenge for the tourism industry in Thailand, this university also recognised the importance of this challenge and prepared itself to respond to this standard by rechecking what skills and contents are required for this standard and adjusting its curriculum to suit. All lecturers at University C have to conduct comparative research between the ASEAN MRA-TP standard and their taught courses. A senior management staff member explained this policy in more detail:

“We did not neglect the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. Unless we focus on international standards, the ASEAN MRA-TP is a new challenge for Thailand’s tourism industry. We have to be concerned. We asked our lecturer staff to conduct comparative research between the ASEAN MRA-TP standard and our curriculum and courses. This can help us to know what content and skills are needed in order to respond to this standard.” (Interviewee CM2)

One lecturer supported the importance of comparing the standard and curriculum and explained more about comparative research:

“ We all have to research my curriculum and my courses. The management team asked me to do the comparative research between ASEAN MRA-TP contents and skills and our curriculum. I think it is a good way to understand what we have now in our curriculum and content and what we need to add more. After conducting this research, we found that some of the necessary or lacking content in my course might be in other subjects. So, we will rearrange and develop our curriculum and courses offered. We might mix similar courses and reject some unnecessary courses. ASEAN MRA-TP can be one of our frameworks in developing our curriculum, in my view.

Interviewees were sure that their curriculum was designed to support international standards, which would include the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. University C put emphasis on the ability of graduates to work in real-life situations. Therefore, its

curriculum was a competency-based curriculum. The learning process of this university then encourages its students to practise the necessary skills needed in real-life working, along with theoretical knowledge. Many activities, such as presentations in English or discussions and exchanging details of real experiences with lecturers, have been applied in the classroom to prepare students for real work situations. Moreover, University C also adjusted its curriculum by extending the students' internship period to six months, more than the requirement of TQF. The internship programme of this university is based on supervised field training, which emphasises the working in a real work situation under the supervision of a real worker. Interviewees believed that this kind of training provided full benefits for the students in terms of receiving feedback for them to improve. As a member of senior management staff explained regarding the intentions behind this mode of training:

“Our curriculum is competency-based learning. All graduates can work well in the business. I assure you. We focus on child-centred learning and encourage two-way communication in the classroom. In every class, we have to discuss subjects and our students should give their views to us. Apart from the learning process, we focus on internships. We have developed our curriculum by extending the internship period to six months. During the internship, our students will work in the businesses as part-time staff without pay. We need to get comments and feedback from the businesses.” (Interviewee CM3)

Furthermore, interviewees also guaranteed that their curriculum matched the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum, based on research results. As mentioned earlier, lecturers had been asked to compare between the ASEAN MRA-TP standard and University C's curriculum to recheck the compatibility of the curriculum and search for any missing content and skills for further development. Their research reported that more than 80 percent of their curriculum could respond to the skills and competencies required in the ASEAN MRA-TP. This result also reflected the importance of the skills and competencies needed from graduates. For this reason, University C had decided to withdraw some theoretical knowledge and focused more on practical learning by using the ASEAN MRA-TP standard as a guideline. A senior lecturer who also worked on the comparative research project revealed in more detail:

“There are three competencies mentioned in the ASEAN MRA-TP, core, generic and functional. My research showed that more than 80 percent of our curriculum was in core competencies. Meanwhile, generic and functional competencies are quite the same as in other careers, such as

working in teams, communication etc. Therefore, we might need to drop some theoretical learning and add more skills training for the benefit of our students.” (Interviewee CS4)

University C put more emphasis on the quality of lecturing staff and preparing short-term plans for development. Starting from the recruitment process, all lecturers at University C must have experience of working in hotel or tourism, as well as airlines. Experience gained from working life was a useful learning resource for this skills-based learning. Exchanging and sharing their working experiences, together with theoretical knowledge, provided the students with a better understanding of working in the tourism business. These experienced lecturers also understood the nature of the business and the expected staffing issues. They could then develop their students to meet those requirements. Therefore, their real working experience in the tourism business was claimed as one of the strengths of this university. However, the weakness of these staff members was a lack of teaching skills. These staff spent their time working in private business, which was far from the academic arena. They might not understand how to teach or classroom management principles. Hence, all new lecturers had to attend training courses provided by university staff on teaching pedagogy. As one senior management staff member clarified:

“All academic staff have to have direct experience of working in hotel and tourism businesses because they can share their experience with our students and our students will have a clear picture of the tourism industry. The main problem is that these staffs do not have strong backgrounds in academic circles; therefore, we need to train them on how to be good teachers and teach pedagogy.” (Interviewee CM4)

For short-term plans, exchanges of staff for training under MOU co-operation was viewed by interviewees as another essential measure to support staff development. As a specialised university, University C has a strong relationship with other specialised universities in tourism and hospitality around the world. Staff exchanges with other universities in the same field provided opportunities to share their views towards learning in tourism and hospitality. Furthermore, University C also intended to support all lecturers to become ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers, the group of trainers who are responsible for training the ASEAN MRA-TP skills for the national trainers. Apart from supporting the goal of this university in serving in an ASEAN MRA-TP training and testing centre, the management team believed that being ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers could increase the university's reputation in being a specialised university in terms of tourism and hospitality. Lecturers could also take

advantage of this role by adapting the ASEAN MRA-TP skills and content elements to their teaching, which would be of benefit for their students. As one senior management member of staff in policy and plan suggested:

“ We have MOUs with many universities, and we encourage the exchange of staff and focus more on staff training. Sharing experiences with other universities is really important for staff development. We learned from other universities what we missed, and we adapted it into our teaching and learning. Another thing, I think this is the best way to encourage our staff. They might need to prepare themselves to adjust the new knowledge, and teaching pedagogy learned from other universities to their way of teaching.” (Interviewee CM2)

One lecturer who worked as an ASEAN MRA-TP master trainer added more detail:

“We intended to be an ASEAN MRA- TP training and testing centre; we must do everything to support this goal. We have planned to send all staff when recruiting and expect them to be master trainers in all areas of the ASEAN MRA- TP. Our students will get the benefit from this as they will know what skills are needed from the ASEAN MRA- TP. They will have a chance to learn any ASEAN MRA- TP content from their lecturers, who are real- life ASEAN MRA- TP master trainers. ”
(Interviewee CS6)

University C might not face the problems of laboratory rooms and equipment used for skills training. Being a specialised university working on producing high- potential graduates in tourism and hospitality provides a clear direction for the university in terms of policy and planning. One of the important plans of this university is to develop training rooms and equipment to sufficiently support the skills training of all students. Apart from the training rooms in this university, strong relationships with nearby hotel businesses also fill the gap in insufficient training equipment. As one management staff member expressed:

“As a narrow- discipline university, our management team agreed to spend more budget on develop our training rooms and buy more hotel equipment to support skills training of our students. I think we did not have a problem on this point.” (Interviewee CM3)

However, the concern of interviewees concerns the limited space in this university. As it is situated in the heart of Bangkok and has limited space, building more physical buildings to support the increasing number of students serves as the main problem of

this university. This disadvantage leads to the loss of opportunities to take in more students, with the potential to attract an increased budget from tuition fees. Although University C has opened another campus in a nearby city, interviewees are still concerned about this problem and see it as a disadvantage of this university. As one staff member suggested:

“In terms of business, I agreed that our university is ready to be a training and testing centre because we have sufficient training rooms and equipment to support the training. We have a strong bond with the hotel business, I accept, however, our university cannot expand any more. The tourism industry is continually growing, and many students are interested in studying at our university. We have a limited number of classrooms, and we cannot accept more students. I think this is to our disadvantage.”

(Interviewee CS5)

Being flexible in working processes and having freedom in resources management are main characteristics that shaped the operation of University C, as a private university, in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. With the nature of a private university, its operation is recognised as having faster decision-making processes when compared to other types of university. The operation of University C is more flexible, even if the decision-making processes of a private university and a government university are not quite the same. All staff in this university understood that academic activities or projects related to the students' development were the top priority and likely to be approved by the management. Although this university works like a company, concerned more about its benefits, providing useful academic activities for students is the mainstay of its concern. However, these academic activities should also be able to support the goals and vision of University C. As one lecturer explained:

“our work is quite flexible if our project is reasonable and good for our students. Our management team always supports the activities that benefit our students. However, we should be aware that we are in business. Some projects might be dropped if they do not support our goals or vision.” (Interviewee CS4)

Another lecturer who had experience as a project manager explained more ideas about the work of University C:

“Before doing a project, we have to think about demand and supply, which means the number of participants in the project and the budget spent on the project, because we are in business. I agree that we have fewer working processes than a government university. A government

university works to support the national plan, with a budget supported by the government, while we are in business. We have to work for ourselves, and we have to survive. It does not mean that we do not care about society. No, we care, but our work should support ourselves as well.” (Interviewee CS7)

However, being a private university sometimes faces the difficulty of receiving support and working with the government. Apart from budgetary support, other types of activities, such as participating in some government projects or bidding for government funding, seem to be harder work for private universities when compared to government universities. Interviewees from University C suggested that the difference in rules and regulations between government and private universities was one of the factors that made it difficult to work with the government. Some limitations of government financing regulations, such as some supporting documents being requested for money claims, sometimes caused difficulties for private universities. Using the same rules and regulations can be an advantage to a government university when bidding for government projects. At the same time, private universities may struggle with complex regulations and have to work on more official documents to declare themselves able to work with the government. Moreover, the government tends to have a closer relationship with government universities, which leads to more opportunities to join some specific government projects being offered. As one senior management staff member explained:

“We struggle in working with the government. We really appreciate working for the government, but the financial rules and regulations stop us. It is too complicated for us as a business, while autonomous and public universities can more easily work with the government. Sometimes, I have thought that the government gave much more support to government universities than to us.” (Interviewee CM3)

5.7.4 Conclusion

A great reputation in providing tourism and hospitality education means that University C is one of the best universities in this area. As a specialised university in hotel and tourism, this university dedicated itself to developing and adjusting its tourism and hotel curriculum to support changing trends in the tourism industry. A well- designed curriculum, with intensive knowledge and professional skills training, attracts many students, both at undergraduate and graduate levels. Moreover, having strong bonds with hotel chains and hiring only experienced lecturers also reinforce its outstanding role in producing qualified graduates who meet the needs of the tourism labour market around the world.

As with other case studies, University C did not focus more on ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP. As mentioned earlier, the tourism and hospitality curriculum of this university were designed to support world tourism trends. Hence, University C believed that there was no substantial impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on the operations of the university, both in terms of policy and curriculum, because it worked beyond ASEAN and focused on international standards. However, the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and standard are still included in its intentions. All lecturers are required to conduct comparative research between the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and their taught courses to ensure that their content supports the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum. Some missing content has been added for the benefit of its students. Its skills training activities also support the competency standards of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Six months of internship programmes through supervised field training are provided by this university to support the needs of skilled graduates in tourism and hospitality.

Not only is there less impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on the policy and curriculum of University C, the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation process, but a lack of interest in working in ASEAN countries and vagueness from the government sector also seems to be supporting factors to make the ASEAN MRA-TP of less importance. In the view of interviewees from University C, the government sector is a significant factor for the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. The ambivalence and a lack of multi-sectoral co-ordination seem to be the problem for the government to deal with. . Interviewees suggested that the first and most important issue was to identify the responsible agency for the ASEAN MRA-TP. They know that MOTS takes responsibility for any matters related to the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. However, some government agencies work on the ASEAN MRA-TP, such as MOL in skills standard testing or even OHEC in monitoring the qualification framework of tourism and hospitality programmes. These government agencies worked on their own and failed to share their information with other agencies, which is an obstacle for the work of universities. Moreover, the vagueness of the government's direction towards the ASEAN MRA-TP is a concern. Apart from the problem of the government sector, the values of Thai graduates towards western countries has also been mentioned as an obstacle of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Interviewees addressed the fact that ASEAN MRA- TP might have less effect on graduates because ASEAN countries were not their targets. Most graduates who are interested in working in Thailand or who participated in internship programmes prefer to work and travel in European countries instead of working in other ASEAN countries.

Nevertheless, the free movement of labour under the ASEAN MRA-TP might create a huge problem for Thai graduates in terms of seeking jobs. Interviewees inevitably accepted that Thai graduates would face problems in getting jobs because of their poor

English skills. They addressed the significant role of English as the communication language in the tourism industry and mentioned that the problem of low English competency of students is prioritised as an urgent problem to solve. As a specialised university in producing skilled tourism professionals who are able to work in real situations, students of University C have to show their potential English skills before working in internship programmes. All students are obliged to pass an English test before attending internship programmes. They are not permitted to work as interns if they do not pass this English test, and they are at risk of not graduating at all, as the internship programme is compulsory. Apart from this English test, many classroom activities have been applied to encourage the English usage of students, such as using English as the learning language and providing English journals.

Interviewees from University C did not see any advantages in being a private university in terms of supporting ASEAN MRA-TP. As with any other type of university, they have to develop any academic activities and projects and pass these through their own internal systems for management approval. The difference showed in having more flexible and faster-working processes. In terms of budget allocation, the management team, in the role at a specialised university, is willing to support any learning activities and projects that are beneficial to their students. However, as there has to be self-supporting funding, budget approval is quite strict. Any approved activities have to be able to show the balance between demand and supply, the number of participants and project budgets, and the ultimate benefits for the university and students. Moreover, the complexity of the financial regulations of the government was mentioned as a problem for private universities when working in the government sector.

5.8 Chapter summary

Through the detailed stories from the three case study universities, these sample universities shared similar responses to the ASEAN MRA-TP. ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP seemed to have less effect on the operation of sample Thai HEIs. None of them denied the importance or even the advantages of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The advantages of ASEAN MRA-TP showed clearly in the area of curriculum development. These three universities expressed that the ASEAN MRA-TP standard could be used as a guideline or framework in developing their current curricula, although they believed that most of the content of their curricula were relevant to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. Some necessary content of the ASEAN MRA-TP is still required to be added to their curricula.

The internationalisation policy and the existing academic activities of these three universities seemed to be able to support the coming of the ASEAN MRA-TP. These three

universities have been encouraged by the government to develop the internationalisation of universities for over 20 years. Their strong backgrounds in internationalisation policy, such as signing MOUs with many foreign universities, student and staff exchanges or even joint programmes and research, helped to pave the way to support any activities with international aspects, and the ASEAN MRA-TP for research. Many current policies and academic activities, such as the improvement of English competencies of students, staff development or even facilities support, were developed to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Concerns about the ASEAN MRA-TP were explained as being due to the ambivalence and lack of coordination in government based organising strategising for the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. The problems of overlapping work of related government agencies and the lack of government guidelines were mentioned. The government, through the eyes of interviewees, seemed to be a key factor in managing the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation. Therefore, strong policies and strategies, as well as clear co-operation between related government agencies, are required by these three universities.

The homogeneous response of these three universities was not related to the different types of Thai university governance. These three case study universities are different in terms of support from the government and the regulations, namely, there was a full budget with government regulation for the public university, a project budget with partial government regulation for the autonomous university and no budget from the government for the private university. However, they shared autonomy in academic administration. These differences did not show a strong impact on the work of universities. These three universities still responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP in the same way. Only some aspects of internal management, such as the flexibility and speed of processes, were different.

After considering the response of the sample of Thai HEIs, the ASEAN MRA-TP seemed not to be in the interest of the sample universities, although its importance was considered and accepted. However, the universities believed that their previous academic activities under the internationalisation policy could be well supported. Moreover, they claimed that their hotel and tourism curricula contained most of the content relevant to the ASEAN MRA-TP standard. Therefore, their direction and operations to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP would be retaining their existing policies and strategies, such as the internationalisation policy, staff development, English language improvement and facilities' support. These three universities also suggested some additional academic activities to strengthen their work, such as curriculum development, by adding some of the ASEAN MRA-TP content or conducting more research on ASEAN tourism. The homogeneous

responses of these three universities also pointed out that the difference in university governance did not affect their operations towards the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Chapter 6

Discussion of Findings

In chapter 5, I presented the core findings from the interviews across the three institutional case studies. Key findings included the perspectives on policy governance at three levels: the regional level, the national level, and the institutional level. This chapter further presents these findings by considering their implications in the context of these three overarching perspectives. ASEAN principles and the ASEAN MRA-TP as a regional agreement are discussed regarding the policy governance at the regional level. At the national level, the topics of the Thai social and economic context, the common organisational structure of Thai HEIs, standardised programmes and quality assurance, the internationalisation policy at the national level, the cooperation of Thai government agencies, and the attitudes of Thai graduates towards ASEAN are analysed. A student exchange, education background, and professional networking of staff in Thai HEIs are explained in the context of policy governance at the institutional level. The extent to which institutional isomorphism is presented across the three university setting in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP will be considered.

6.1 A summary of the key research findings

The main objective of this research was to understand how Thai HEIs have responded to the ASEAN integration, especially concerning the change associated with the free flow of tourism professionals in accordance with the ASEAN MRA-TP. The interview data suggest that Thai HEIs seem not to take the ASEAN MRA-TP into account in their institutional planning and strategy. Instead, Thai HEIs continue to commit to a more general principle of internationalisation of higher education as the foundation in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The sample Thai HEIs define the ASEAN MRA-TP as a part of the international agenda, which can respond by developing an internationalisation policy. The responses of Thai HEIs to the ASEAN MRA-TP are similar, despite historical difference and differences of institutional governance.

The content of interviews tended to focus on conceptualisations of the ASEAN MRA-TP through the lens of three different perspectives: regional, national and institutional governance. Therefore, these three perspectives have been applied to explain the findings.

- The perspectives for policy at the regional governance level
- The perspectives for policy at the national governance level
- The perspectives for policy at the institutional governance level

The changes in the sample Thai HEIs associated with the ASEAN MRA-TP, in some cases, are seen as obstacles. The principle of non-enforcement in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP has become the main reason for low interest among Thai HEIs. The inconsistency between the ASEAN MRA-TP standards and international tourism and hospitality standards was frequently mentioned in the interviews. Some ASEAN MRA-TP standards are local-based standard, suitable only for some location. These points have raised concerns over whether the ASEAN MRA-TP is fit for purpose in Thai HEIs. In addition, the preference for working in other non-ASEAN is another factor that might lead to the lack of successful implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. With these challenges, the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP among Thai HEIs requires strong support and encouragement from other actors, particularly regulatory agencies.

Government policy is necessary for implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. All three universities indicated that a clear directive from the government on the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand is needed to safeguard and improve institutional policies and practices. However, the ambivalence of the government sector in formulating policy to support the ASEAN MRA-TP, the process entailed in transferring the policy to practice, as well as the overlapping work between different governmental agencies, has hampered the response of Thai HEIs to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Without an explicit government mandate, Thai universities have responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP without clear direction. The Thai Government's role in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand, according to the interviewees, is unclear and inadequate for achieving the goals formulated by ASEAN. Instead,

universities appear to retain existing policies and strategies in their response to the ASEAN MRA-TP, such as continued investment in staff capacity building and as may relate to curriculum development. The existing internationalisation policy has been continued and applied as a response. Each case study showed that activities and development related to the ASEAN MRA-TP had taken place.

However, an interesting point revealed by the analysis is the consistency of Thai universities' responses to the ASEAN MRA-TP, even though they are different in governance and administration. As explained in the previous chapter, and as can be seen in Table 10, the selected case studies embody differences in terms of governance, support and administration. They are classified as an autonomous university, public university and private university. Surprisingly, the difference in financial support and internal administration did not affect the operations of the universities while responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. All three universities showed similar patterns in their responses.

This interesting finding facilitates a better understanding of the actual situation in the Thai higher education sector when implementing the regional cooperation agenda. These results reveal the similar orientation of different types of Thai HEIs; who commit to academic activities in regional level fall under the internationalisation umbrella. The role of the government in driving the implementation of regional activities at the national level is still important. A clear goal and direction from the government in responding to regional cooperation is necessary for the smooth operation of Thai HEIs. Although ambiguity in the government policy context has been reported, Thai HEIs have still shown a homogeneous response towards the ASEAN MRA-TP – no actual interest – despite their different methods of governance. This phenomenon summarises the relationship between the government sector and Thai HEIs, in addition to the key factors related to the operation of Thai HEIs while responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The next section, cross-case research findings is presented in order to provide clear information on the key findings across three institutional case studies.

6.2 Cross-case research findings

Overview of the findings

Table 9 shows that the three sample Thai HEIs shared similar views and perspectives toward the ASEAN MRA-TP, and explained the role of the government in supporting Thai HEIs. The only benefit of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the views of the three Thai HEIs is an additional framework for curriculum and staff development. The competencies and standards of the ASEAN MRA-TP can be used as a guideline for improving the tourism and hospitality programmes of Thai HEIs and as a training tool for faculty and staff. However, the non-enforceable principles and the low interest of Thai graduates in working in ASEAN countries lessen its importance in the view of Thai HEIs. University A expressed concern about the relevance of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the Thai context. The ASEAN MRA-TP standards are different and challenging to apply in Thailand in some areas as it was designed to support the specific characteristics of some location, i.e., preparing the special meat provided only in some location. This concern led to hesitation about the benefit gained from the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand. Overall, the ASEAN MRA-TP seemed to have little effect on the operations of Thai HEIs. Hence, the responses of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP are similar. Activities under a higher education internationalisation agenda are continually promoted by institutions as a means of implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. The existing student and staff exchanges and research collaboration are extended to cover tourism and hospitality programmes. Short course training and English language courses are also developed for the preparation of Thai graduates and other tourism professionals. English language development is the focus of the three Thai HEIs. All three universities pressed their concern about the English competencies of their graduates. English language competence is an important skill for Thai graduates to compete with others in the ASEAN labour market, which has a free flow of skilled labourers.

Table 11: Cross-case Research findings

Categories	Sub-categories	University A	University B	University C
Perspective of Thai HEIs	<p>ASEAN</p> <p>ASEAN MRA-TP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages • Disadvantages • The roles of government 	<p>Less impact</p> <p>Less impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being the framework for curriculum development • Evaluate the graduate's skills and competencies • Good for personnel development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not suitable for Thai context • Disinterest of Thai graduates in ASEAN tourism industry <p>Direct impact (policy + implementation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency in ASEAN MRA-TP implementation process • Overlapping work between the government agencies 	<p>Less impact</p> <p>Less impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being the framework for curriculum development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enforced/irrelevant to university's graduates • Disinterest of Thai graduates in ASEAN tourism industry <p>Direct impact (policy + implementation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency in ASEAN MRA-TP implementation process • Overlapping work between the government agencies • Lack of advertisement of the importance and principles of ASEAN MRA-TP 	<p>Less impact</p> <p>Less impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being the framework for curriculum development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job scramble • Disinterest of Thai graduates in ASEAN tourism industry <p>Direct impact (policy + implementation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency in ASEAN MRA-TP implementation process • Lack of cooperation between related government agencies

Categories	Sub-categories	University A	University B	University C
Operation of Thai HEIs	Policy and strategy	Internationalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the network Developing academic activities related to ASEAN MRA-TP 	Internationalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the network Short course training 	Internationalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting research comparing between its curriculum and ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum Applying for being ASEAN MRA-TP training and testing centre Short course training
	English language Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the use of English through learning and classroom activities More credits for English Exit exam Extra classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging the use of English through learning and classroom activities Extra classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the use of English through learning and classroom activities Exit exam before Internship
	Curriculum Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN MRA-TP as a framework for curriculum development Adjusting some missing contents in the courses Active learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN MRA-TP as a framework for curriculum development Adjusting some missing contents in the courses Extending the internship period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN MRA-TP as a framework for curriculum development Adjusting some missing contents in the courses Adding more practical skills training and dropping some theoretical courses
	Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging staff to train for being ASEAN MRA-TP master trainer Staff exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging staff to train for being ASEAN MRA-TP master trainer Staff exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging staff to train for being ASEAN MRA-TP master trainer Staff exchange Recruiting lecturers who have direct experience in working in tourism industry
Thai HEIs management	Type of Thai HEIs	Autonomous university	Public university	Private University
	Decision-making process	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Bottom-up
	Internal management	Own system	Bureaucracy system	Own system
	Decision on budget allocation	Priority/ related to the mission of university	Priority/ related to the mission of university	Make the most benefit for university and students

The role of government

The three sampled Thai HEIs also expressed similar perspectives on the importance of government, even though they had different levels of government intervention. Many problems related to the work of the government, such as the inconsistency of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation process and the overlapping work between government agencies, are mentioned as obstacles for the successful implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Interestingly, university C seemed to have more plans and activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP when compared with the other universities. The reasons behind the performance of University C is that it is a university that specialises in tourism and hospitality. The coming of the ASEAN MRA-TP is its interest. There is little difference between the operations of university A and university B. In terms of budget expenditure, University C interests in the win-win situation, gaining benefit for both the university and the students. For Universities A and B, their budgets are supported by the government, with different levels of control. The decisions on budget expenditure in these two universities are based on the mission of the universities. The most important issues that require immediate action are set as a priority, i.e., student and staff exchange and the development of English of Thai students. University C is compliant with government policy requires the leadership of the government, the same as university A (an autonomous university) and university B (a public university), even though it is far from government control and support. Therefore, the different types of university governance might not be a key factor in shaping the responses of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP.

6.3 Institutional isomorphism in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs

As highly rationalised institutions and their primary role in producing the graduates to serve the country, universities provide an important and useful ecosystem from which to study the effects of institutionalisation (Meyer et al., 2007; Shields and Watermeyer, 2018). Higher education institutions exist within changeable environments affected by global political, economic and social changes (Croucher and Woelert, 2015). The possible responses to these challenges can be broadly explained in two main streams: the convergence and the divergences theses (Vaira, 2004). Convergence refers to the homogenisation, or the tendency towards

institutional isomorphism, while divergence expresses the heterogenisation, or differentiation in the response of universities.

Most studies on institutional changes in universities tend to support the idea of isomorphism, first developed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). When universities are faced with complex, competitive and uncertain environments, the successful strategy for their survival is to conform with other universities in the same environment through many processes, including regulatory forces, mimicking outstanding universities or professional networking. The idea of the resemblance of organisations is widely acknowledged and used as the theoretical framework for understanding changes in higher education (Cai, 2009; Joo and Halx, 2012; Croucher and Woelert, 2015; Karatas Acer and Güclü, 2016). This idea also supports the phenomenon of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP in this research. According to the findings, the sample Thai HEIs showed a similar response towards the ASEAN MRA-TP and tended to resemble each other. As seen in Table 9, the perspectives and the operations of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP are similar. The three sample universities shared the same perspectives and experiences towards ASEAN and ASEAN MRA-TP and the same attitude in respect of the role of government in supporting the implementation of ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. The internationalisation of higher education and the existing academic activities have been raised as the key mechanism in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella can apply to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The variety in university governance affected little difference in the operations of the three sample universities.

Therefore, institutional isomorphism has been applied as the key theory for understanding the changes in Thai HEIs towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The study on institutional isomorphism in public sector organisations by Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) has also been used for understanding the Thai HEIs' responses to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The work of Joo and Halx (2012) on isomorphism pressures in institutionalisation contributed to the framework of my research study. This research provides useful information for understanding the key actors that affect the changes in universities when faced with the new challenge. The concept of key actors was used as a guideline for this research on Thai HEIs. The work of Caravella (2011) on institutional isomorphism in distance learning in higher education also identifies sources of isomorphic pressures, such as standardised programme and government regulation. These sources can be well applied in the Thai HEIs context.

In this research, four key actors are considered as the sources of pressures for change in Thai HEIs; the ASEAN MRA-TP itself, the Thai government, Thai HEIs and Thai contexts (political, economic and social). The policy, activities and behaviours of these key actors provide an in-depth understanding of the real situations and the reasons behind the Thai HEIs responses towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. These key actors also express the three isomorphic pressures – coercive, mimetic and normative, which can contribute to understanding the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. These three forces of isomorphism are also useful to explain the current organisational structure in Thai HEIs, through the idea of the politics and ceremony that pervade much modern organisational life (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.66). They can express the perception towards the ASEAN MRA-TP through the operations of Thai HEIs, as well as the conflict among stakeholders towards institutional diversity (Vaira, 2004; Beckert, 2010). Thus the analysis of the operations of Thai HEIs under the institutional isomorphism framework can draw a clear picture of how Thai HEIs have responded to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The similarity in the responses of Thai HEIs

The three Thai HEIs showed homogeneous responses towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. This relates to the idea of DiMaggio and Powell (1983; 1991) that the operations of Thai HEIs are driven not only by the efficiency of organisations, but also by the desire to conform to environmental pressures for being accepted. According to the finding, the three Thai HEIs clearly expressed low interest in the ASEAN MRA-TP, as it was considered an international activity of universities. However, strong encouragement from the government and the expectations of Thai society towards the role of Thai HEIs encouraged the operations of Thai HEIs. The operations of Thai HEIs are triggered by many sources of pressure related to the ASEAN MRA-TP: coercive pressure (regulatory mandates and persuasion), mimetic reinforcements (the non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP and the vagueness of the government) and normative values (education, working background and on-the-job-socialisation). This research also supports the findings of Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004), that government and non-profit organisation, in this case, the sample Thai HEIs, tend to conform to environmental pressure in the process of institutional change in the same level. Interestingly, the three Thai HEIs are different in the level of government intervention. This difference serves as an anti-isomorphic pressure, which can lead to the heterogeneity of the operations of Thai HEIs. However, government pressures in the form of quality assurance and social pressures on the role of universities in job training, overcome the demand for institutional diversity (Joo and Halx, 2012). The below sub-section will identify the

isomorphic pressures, at different levels of governance, that reflect the operation of Thai HEIs in responding to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

6.3.1 Institutional isomorphism in the policy at the regional governance level

The research findings revealed that the actions of Thai HEIs towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP are not due to real interest. The three Thai HEI staff members expressed little interest in the ASEAN MRA-TP itself, as it is considered an international activity. The ASEAN MRA-TP, according to the interviewees, is the regional agreement suitable to be the framework for curriculum development. However, the non-enforcement principles of the ASEAN MRA-TP and the disinterest of Thai graduates in the ASEAN tourism industry have been pointed out as concerns that have led to the low status of ASEAN MRA-TP as an institutional priority.

In this research, the external environment for the Thai higher education sector is the ASEAN MRA-TP. This environment can create a coercive force in Thai HEIs. Joo and Halx (2012) revealed that coercive pressure could result from the demands of other organisations outside the organisational field. When these external organisations dominate an organisation through different types of support, including a mandatory agreement or financial aid, they can force that organisation to follow their policy or directions. Given this explanation, the regional agreement in ASEAN can serve as the force of the Thai government to implement the ASEAN MRA-TP. Furthermore, the non-enforcement principle is a vital factor that led to the homogeneous response of Thai HEIs. Together with the fact that Thailand delayed signing the ASEAN MRA-TP, this principle has affected the motivation of Thai HEIs in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. The interviewees from the Thai HEIs expressed their concern about the unsuccessful implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand, even though there was strong encouragement from the government.

Supported by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), when organisations are faced with uncertainty or unclear solutions, they tend to imitate more successful organisations. In this case, Thai HEIs decided to imitate each other in the way of using the success of academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, the non-enforcement principle, together with the unclear direction of the Thai government, are the origins of uncertainty. These situations encourage imitation in the operation of Thai HEIs responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

ASEAN and its principles

Unlike the EU as a supranational organisation, ASEAN is a common intergovernmental organisation. The intra-regional cooperation of ASEAN is unique.. Consultation and consensus, with non-interference in internal affairs, is the fundamental norm of the practice of ASEAN (Acharya, 2004). These principles are, in this research, the tacit force or the pressures for the homogenisation of Thai HEIs when responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The uniqueness of ASEAN cooperation can be examined through the lens of regionalism in Southeast Asia. Since the formation of ASEAN, the cooperation of Southeast Asian countries has occurred for political and security purposes (Narine, 2002). The expansion of communism and the interference of external powers have been treated as common threats that require immediate action for the states to retain their sovereignty. Regional cooperation in the beginning period was state-led political cooperation. Supported by the idea of Realism, each nation-state decided to strengthen their relationship based on a reciprocal concept for balancing power (Rüland, 2000). The cooperation of ASEAN states in the establishment period still focuses on national interests and safeguarding from threats, more than socioeconomic development. This idea is reflected in the unique characteristic of ASEAN cooperation, encompassing non-interference, consultation and consensus agreements. The cooperation under ASEAN was not designed for developing the ASEAN to be the supranational institutions; on the other hand, it serves as a forum for dialogue between member states (Dosch, 2011).

Although ASEAN dedicated itself to promoting regional economic development after the Cold War period, soft cooperation is still a fundamental part of ASEAN. The reinvention of ASEAN has focused on building strong cooperation with neighbouring countries, on exerting the region's bargaining power in the global market through economic cooperation (Stubb and Reed, 2006). Since individual countries had different levels of development and cultural backgrounds, it was necessary to create norms, values and identity for institutional building. This flexible cooperation became known as the ASEAN way. The influence of Constructivism in ASEAN integration has explicitly appeared in the formation of the ASEAN way. The principles of interdependence and national sovereignty, with non-interference, are the fundamental concepts of the ASEAN way. Accordingly, the decision-making process is based on consultation and consensus. There is no legal body governing and controlling how the countries cooperate. This type of cooperation reflects the ASEAN attitude in rejecting the supranational idea, the main goal of EU (Radhie, 1991).

However, this informal institutional cooperation is also the main impediment to greater ASEAN integration (Davidson, 2004; Jetschke, 2009; Rüländ, 2011; Roth, 2015). However, this action reflects the failure of ASEAN in solving issues which entailed the disagreement of member states. The rule of ASEAN cooperation focuses on providing a broad-level cooperation framework. The interpretation of this framework and the implementation hinges on the decision of member states. There is no commitment or obligation to force the member states to follow an agreement, and there is no significant legal body governing the cooperation. This kind of loose cooperation is reflected in the process of policy transfer and the implementation within the context of nation-states.

ASEAN MRA-TP as a regional agreement

According to the findings, Thailand has capitalised on the opportunity provided by the weakness of ASEAN principles, when making its decision about signing the ASEAN MRA-TP agreement. Thailand delayed signing the ASEAN MRA-TP for three years after all other member states had signed. The main reason for this delay was to reconsider the pros and cons of this agreement and listen to the views of stakeholder within the country. This decision led all member states to question the commitment of the Thai government towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. The importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP in the view of the cabinet and government also came under scrutiny. Therefore, when Thai government agreed to sign the ASEAN MRA-TP, the signing served as the coercive pressure for Thailand in following the mandates and regulations related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, as well as higher education institutions implementing this agreement in the country.

The ASEAN way, the norms of ASEAN in using consultation and consensus in cooperation between ASEAN member countries, is also reflected in the principles of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP by education providers remains voluntary. It is not obligatory. Through the continued development, economic integration within the regions become the key interest of ASEAN, which also shaped the principles and functions of ASEAN itself. In the ASEAN context, the idea of market sovereignty is applied to ensure the sovereignty of member states (Juego, 2015). The goal of a free market with avoiding the intervention of government can portray the process of the ASEAN MRA-TP. In this case, the ASEAN committee, the cabinet and the government agencies of each member state focused only on providing the supporting policies and regulations. In Thailand, the cabinet and government were mandated to reinforce the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP by appointing the national committees mentioned in the agreement, as well as ensuring

cooperation with relevant stakeholders within the country. Their main duties were to encourage the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP by guiding and facilitating the process in terms of policies and regulations and not by forcing stakeholders to apply it. The decision about applying the ASEAN MRA-TP is based on all stakeholders, including education providers and graduates. The decision concerning the registration for the ASEAN MRA-TP certificate is also voluntary. Only graduates or employees who are interested in working in other ASEAN countries are registered as ASEAN tourism professionals. This means that all workers in the labour market can apply for this certificate, not just those who are in the tourism and hospitality programmes. This voluntary status is an obstacle to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP, according to views expressed in the interviews. Because of this, Thai HEIs have made no commitments to implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. Thai HEIs have the right to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP, which means that they might choose not to develop any activities to support it.

Given the above explanation, ASEAN and the ASEAN MRA-TP seem to be the Thai government's way of exerting intense coercive pressure at the regional level. The government agencies are thus the main actors in transferring this agreement into practice. In this stage, Thai HEIs serve as the operational unit for implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP. However, the non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP led to uncertainty regarding the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. This uncertainty of the ASEAN MRA-TP also serves as a tacit pressure on Thai HEIs to imitate more legitimate organisations.

6.3.2 Institutional isomorphism in the policy at the national governance level

According to the research findings, the Thai government serves as the vital actor in transferring the regional policy of ASEAN into practice. The interviewees agreed on the importance of the Thai government to the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. They suggested that the leading role of the Thai government in facilitating the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP, including formulating the related policies and strategies, is still required. Even though the bureaucracy does not control some groups of Thai HEIs, the guidelines and directions from the Thai government are still relevant. However, the overlapping work and lack of cooperation between the government agencies are expressed as obstacles to the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation. This phenomenon also led to an insecure feeling and the similar response of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. Moreover, the Thai social and economic context is seen as the accelerator for the homogenisation of Thai HEIs. The economic development and social changes in Thailand, as well as

the expectations of Thai society towards the higher education sector, are shaping the direction and pattern of Thai higher education.

In this research, with the political and social background of Thailand, the Thai government is the primary source of coercive isomorphism, through the way they govern and administer Thai HEIs. Coercive isomorphism 'results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organisations function' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p.150). It can appear as the exercise of a power regime and stems from 'political influence and the need for legitimacy' (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004, p.285) within organisations. Although the three Thai HEIs have different levels of budget support from the government and different government regulations, the quality assurance monitoring by the government is still a potent force affecting the operations of Thai HEIs. Educational reform in Thailand also influences the institutional change in Thai HEIs. This research provides explicit evidence that coercive pressure in Thai HEIs stems specifically from the Thai Qualification Framework for Higher Education (TQF) in tourism and hospitality programmes and the initiative on the policy of internationalisation on Thai higher education. Other related factors, such as government policy on ASEAN, or the indirect forces of government on the budget allocation system, also reinforce the coercive pressures.

Thai social and economic context

Higher education is recognised as a key mechanism for a country's development. The quality of higher education contributes to a country's competitiveness (Hedin, Barnes and Chen, 2005). The reason behind this point of view is that higher education is the key agent in producing human capital through life-long learning, and serves as the key for the sustainability of businesses and industries (Manassarian, 2005). This fact can apply to all countries, including Thailand. The main goal of Thai higher education is to support national social and economic advancement. It is also required to build a strong foundation to support the competitive position of the country in the globalised economy (Ministry of Education, 1999). As Joo and Halx (2012) noted, coercive isomorphism seems to be closely associated with historical and social contexts and policy environments. These environments can provide policy actors and institutional with legitimacy (Bernasconi, 2006; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977) for the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Therefore, supported by the findings, the Thai government and the Thai context seem to be the main actors producing coercive isomorphism in the operation of Thai HEIs.

The change in the Thai context forces the government to determine the direction of the higher education sector through reforms of education (Raktham, 2012; Fry, 2004; Bovornsiri, Uampuang and Fry, 1996; Fry and Bi, 2013). These reforms, in this research, reveal the strong influence of context and the government in determining the direction of the higher education policy. They also serve as the hidden force for supporting coercive isomorphism in this research.

The National Education Act in 1999 affected the entirety of the Thai education system and administration. The key elements related to the work of higher education were the provision of 12 years of free education, with nine years of compulsory education; the merging of the MOE, MUA and ONEC into a single Ministry of Education; the granting of autonomy to educational institutions; and quality assurance requirements for the whole education system. This reform served as the foundation for the current Thai education system, which led to a significant change in the higher education sector. As explained above, the changes in the Thai context have strongly influenced the work of the government. These changes also triggered the exercise of government power in governing and monitoring the Thai higher education sector and HEIs

The Common organisational structure of Thai HEIs

The education reform, together with the economic and social development, also increase the imitating behaviour of Thai HEIs. The mimetic pressures can occur when 'an organisation consciously models itself after another that it believes in representing a high level of success and achievement in the public eye' (Hanson, 2001, p.649). Supported by Caravella (2011) and Joo and Halx (2012), the common organisational structure of Thai HEIs serves as a powerful mimicking pressure in this research. The successful organisation is seen as a pioneer, with regard to organisational structure, while other organisations borrow or copy that structure for efficiency. In this research, the 'selective borrowing' (Lao, 2015, p.24) of higher education systems and university structures from Western and American universities is seen as the origin of mimetic reinforcement.

Many other countries have experienced the Western or American influence on their education system. However, Thailand was an exception. Thailand was the only country in Southeast Asia that survived the expansion of Westernism (Fry, 2002; Bhumiratana and Commins, 2012; Rhein, 2016). Western influence in education was observed less. However, this did not mean that Thailand developed its education system by itself. Thailand took a 'selective approach', selecting the aspects from Western education systems that were most relevant to the Thai context, to retain its

cultural and social values (Bhumiratana and Commins, 2012). Together with the influence of America expanded to Thai society, the fundamental aspects of the current Thai HEIs, such as the credit system and course structure were applied from the American system.

As suggested by Croucher and Woelert (2015), a formal organisational structure is a strong force for the uniformity of HEIs when faced with a variety of challenges. This suggestion can apply to the situation in Thai higher education. The social expectations of the role of Thai HEIs, which led to the massification of higher education in Thailand and a high level of competition in the education market, are implied by the research findings. Many attempts at reforming higher education have been made, for a better quality of education and diversity in higher education, i.e., encourage the autonomous status of Thai HEIs, categorise four groups of Thai HEIs by their mission and goals and develop quality assurance scheme, was applied to monitor and control the massification of higher education. However, Thai HEIs are still uniform. The significant convergence, in terms of university structure and administration, is the important factor for this uniformity. The sample Thai HEIs intended to develop unique tourism and hospitality programmes, to support the needs of the international labour market and to attract more students. However, the regulatory force of the Thai government, with regard to the qualification framework, lessened the academic freedom of Thai HEIs. This, in turn, shaped the homogeneity of Thai HEIs.

As mentioned earlier, the development of higher education in Thailand was rooted in the idea of the modernisation of the country. The population growth and socio-economic development have led to increasing demand for educated workers and, as a result, Thai HEIs have rapidly expanded. Since the establishment of the first Thai university in 1917, the universities in Thailand have continually flourished. The government's efforts in expanding higher education in regional areas was successful. The deregulation of private higher education also supports the increased demand for higher education. These private HEIs served as demand-absorbing institutions (Praphamontripong, 2005). As the number of Thai HEIs grew, high competition in the sector was inevitable. Thai HEIs applied the same organisational structure, strategies and missions to respond to the needs of all students. Popular programmes were offered in almost all Thai HEIs, such as humanities and language, business administration and management, as well as tourism and hospitality programmes. There were a few specialised universities, mostly in professional areas, such as medicine or military schools. The diversification of Thai HEIs seemed to be based on sources of funding, instead of academic differentiation (Praphamontripong, 2005).

Standardised programme and quality assurance

Apart from the influence of education reform and the expectation of Thai society, the government policy in quality assurance in higher education also affects the homogeneity of Thai HEIs. As Caravella (2011) suggested, an increase in government mandates introduces intense coercive pressure to the field. The findings revealed that the relationship between the Thai government and Thai HEIs is mostly in the form of cooperation and encouragement. The Thai government asked Thai HEIs to participate in the government's activities, instead of forcing them through governing measures. However, in terms of quality assurance, the Thai government had controlled and monitored the quality of higher education through the policy mandate and the higher education qualification framework which introduce coercive pressure in this research.

Quality of education at all levels was a significant issue for the Thai government to consider (Trakulphadejkrai, 2011). There were many attempts to improve quality in both the public and private sectors of higher education. An important official attempt was expressed under the 1999 *National Education Act*, which declared the importance of establishing formal educational standards and a quality assurance system (Harman, 2002). ONESQA was established as an independent agency; it received funding support from the government to develop criteria and methods of external assessment for all educational institutions at all levels. The educational institutions and their governing agencies were required to provide internal quality assurance (Rattananuntapat, 2015). Apart from both internal and external quality assurance, the TQF was also developed by the OHEC, the governing agency of Thai higher education. The framework intended to guarantee that the quality of graduates, credits, degrees and qualifications received from higher education institutions met the standard requirements. It was designed to cover six levels of qualifications (Advanced Diploma, Bachelor, Graduate Diploma, Master, Higher Graduate Diploma and Doctor) by focusing on the learning outcomes. These outcomes were categorised into five domains: morality and ethics, knowledge, intellectual skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, and skills in quantitative analysis, communication and information technology usage (OHEC, 2010, p.21). It also enabled credit transfer between institutions. The TQF become the main actor in producing the coercive pressure mentioned above when the OHEC specially developed a TQF for bachelor's degrees in tourism and hospitality.

During the interviews, the TQF was raised as the reason why the Thai curriculum in tourism and hospitality can respond well to the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum. It was

reported to be 'a directive by the OHEC to be used by all higher education institutions in Thailand' (Maneerat, Malaivongs and Khlaisang, 2015, p.229). The curriculum design framework for bachelor's degrees in tourism and hospitality was published in the Government Gazette in 2000. All Thai HEIs who offered tourism and hospitality programmes were required to follow this framework. In the process of developing the TQF for tourism and hospitality programmes, a working group was established. This included experts in tourism and hospitality, stakeholders and the OHEC. The working group considered and learned from many tourism and hospitality standards around the world, such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, including ACCSTP and CATC of ASEAN, and applied what they learned to the TQF for tourism and hospitality (OHEC, 2010).

With the characteristics of TQF, it can serve as the mimetic force for the homogenisation of Thai HEIs. As Caravella (2011) suggested, the standardised programme formats can be a possible source for mimetic enforcement. Providing similar structures and course syllabus can lead to common learning activities. In this research, TQF in tourism and hospitality programme is designed by OHEC in order to guarantee the quality of tourism and hospitality education in Thailand. In the meantime, it also provides the desired tourism and hospitality programme for Thai HEIs, which results in similar contents and academic activities.

As Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) explained, the three isomorphic pressures can overlap and intermingle in the empirical setting. The TQF is in the form of a government mandate, which demonstrates coercive power over the Thai HEIs. However, it also encourages homogeneity as mimetic pressure. Being accredited universities in tourism and hospitality programme can express the high quality of learning and teaching in tourism and hospitality of these universities and support the reputation of universities. These benefits can encourage Thai HEIs to follow the TQF and leads to similar tourism and hospitality programmes offered by Thai HEIs.

From the development outlined above, it is clear that the TQF created an intense coercive pressure, (Caravella, 2011) and also served as the hidden mimetic pressure which shaped the conformity of Thai HEIs. This direct force from the government in implementing the TQF in tourism and hospitality curricula led to a similarity in qualifications and standards between tourism and hospitality undergraduate programmes. This homogeneity can support the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and standards. Many interviewees also pointed out the similarity of their curriculum, resulting from the TQF.

Internationalisation policy at the national level

Apart from the TQF, the research findings revealed that the key means of responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP is through the internationalisation strategy of higher education. The sample Thai HEIs believed that their strong background in internationalisation could respond to any international agenda, including the ASEAN MRA-TP. The role of Thai HEIs in producing and training workers to meet the requirements of the new global professions and the new knowledge economy is considered a challenge for Thailand (Marginson, 2006). The universities' internationalisation policies were developed to fulfil the universities' missions to produce a qualified workforce and strengthen their competitive ability in a learning society (Scott, 2000). Hence, many aspects related to internationalisation, such as international government policies, economic integration, a movement toward a knowledge-based economy and environmental change, were considered when planning for higher education (Pimpa, 2011). The high demand of the business sector and the importance of internationalisation within international organisations also triggered the initiative to include internationalisation in the higher education development plan.

As suggested by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive pressure can be in the form of persuasion or an invitation to join in collusion. The status of internationalisation in Thai HEIs can be supported by this suggestion. The policy on internationalisation in Thai HEIs can be supported by this suggestion. The policy on internationalisation was not officially enforced like the TQF; however, the reinforcement from the government, together with the change in the Thai social context, played a vital role in the success of the internationalisation of Thai higher education. With the growth of cultural and economic cooperation between Thailand and the international community, this method of responding to global factors was endorsed in the National Social and Economic Development Plan, as well as in the First Long Range Plan for Higher Education Development (1990-2004). Because of the economic conditions of that period, the country gradually shifted to a service-based economy, and the demand for a workforce with foreign language proficiency also increased. The fact that Thai universities started to promote their courses to international students also supported the growth of internationalisation in Thai higher education (Kanjaniyot, 2003).

The dramatic growth of internationalisation in Thai higher education occurred during the economic crisis (Pimpa, 2011). With the chaos after the devaluation of the Baht, more Thai students stayed with the international programme offered by Thai

universities, instead of going abroad to study, with the concomitant higher tuition fees and living costs (Fry, 2002). For their survival, many Thai HEIs decided to adapt themselves by providing international programmes, as well as following the government strategy, to achieve internationally recognised standards in higher education (Pimpa, 2011).

The cooperation of Thai government agencies

Apart from the government strategies and policies in higher education, the research findings also revealed the stakeholder policy that affected the operations of Thai HEIs. ASEAN was an interesting goal for Thailand, as mentioned in both the eleventh (2012-2016) and twelfth (2017-2021) national economic and social development plans. The policy related to the preparation of the Thai workforce for ASEAN labour mobility was endorsed by the cabinet and required strong actions from related government agencies. Improving the professional and language skills of Thai workers and setting up a professional qualification framework were the two main measures in preparing the Thai workforce for ASEAN (Office of National Economic and Social Development Board, 2011; 2016). This required the work of three main government agencies: MOTS, MOL and MOE. MOTS, as the main agency responsible for the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand, was required to work closely with the ASEAN Tourism committee and follow the ASEAN commitment. MOL also forced itself to develop professional standards for tourism, by using the ASEAN MRA-TP standard as a reference. MOE, including the OHEC, took responsibility for language proficiency.

Although the policies related to the ASEAN MRA-TP are clearly stated at a government level, the process of transferring policies into practice remains the main problem, as mentioned by the interviewees and reported in the research findings. The characteristic of the Thai bureaucratic system to work independently and not share its information with other agencies (Chandarasorn, 2009) is an obstacle that has resulted in the failure of the government sector in administering the ASEAN MRA-TP in the Thai context. The interviewees reported the overlapping of work and a lack of cooperation between government agencies. The protracted political problems, including the resignation of the prime minister, the dissolution of the House of Representatives and the frequent changes in the cabinet, were also mentioned as reasons for political instability, which led to the discontinuity of policy implementation in Thailand (Nimpanich, 2011). Many initiated projects related to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP, which required cooperation with Thai HEIs, were rejected

due to the changes in the cabinet. This led to awkward situations for the Thai HEIs in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The perception of Thai graduates towards ASEAN

Not only the unstable situation of the Thai government, but the lack of interest of Thai HEIs in implementing the ASEAN MRA-TP is also encouraged by the perception of Thai graduates towards ASEAN countries. The findings indicated that Thai graduates are more interested in working or doing internships in English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Europe and the United States, than in ASEAN countries. The reasons they gave were self-development and compensation rates. The graduates believe that if they are accepted to work in Western countries, they will reach international standards that go beyond ASEAN standards. This also provides them with an opportunity to improve their English skills and earn more money compared to working in Thailand or other ASEAN countries. This perception is developed from a geographical and cultural perspective and influenced by Thai textbooks and media (Thianthai and Thomson, 2007). Thai graduates view ASEAN member countries through the Thai-centric perspective (Winichkul, 2005). Southeast Asian countries are seen as neighbouring countries. Although the Thai government has tried hard to promote an ASEAN identity, the perception of Thai students has not changed. With geographic and cultural connections, Thai students feel that they have a strong bond with ASEAN countries and feel more comfortable in ASEAN countries than in other countries. Thianthai and Thomson (2007) suggested that many commonalities between Thailand and other ASEAN countries, such as history, rituals, arts and customs, indistinguishable physical appearance, climate and common difficult experiences have caused Thai students to feel a close bond with other ASEAN countries. These factors have led to the familiarity between Thai students and ASEAN member countries, and these countries do not pose a challenge for Thai students.

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Joo and Halx (2012), there is a strong bond between the ambiguity of organisational strategy and isomorphic pressure. When the Thai HEIs are unsure about the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand, they have to find their own way to survive. This process results 'from standard responses to uncertainty' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.67) and the limitation of certain structures (Meyer and Rowan, 1992; 2006). However, as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) noted, Thai HEIs might not be aware that they are modelling or have no desire to copy each other. Uncertainty encourages Thai HEIs

to find a suitable way for their survivals. Imitating the legitimate and successful HEIs serves as a convenient practice for Thai HEIs.

From this research, it can be seen that the operations at the national level, as well as the influence of Thai social and economic development, affected the behaviour of Thai HEIs in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP (Vaira, 2004; Joo and Halx, 2011). The government is the driving force for the homogeneity of institutions, through its policies, regulations and accreditation (Frumkin and Galakiewicz, 2004). This was the main source of coercive pressure, while the influences from society served as the accelerator for the change. Both the enforcement promoted by the government in the form of the TQF, and the encouragement through government policy are pressures that shape the conformity of Thai HEI operations. In the meantime, the mimetic pressures also exerted from the operations of Thai HEIs. The similarity of university structure, the expectations of society towards the roles of higher education and the standardised programme formats designed by government also support mimetic reinforcement (Caravella, 2011).

6.3.3 Institutional isomorphism in the policy at the institutional governance level

According to the research findings, similar policies and strategies are applied by the sample Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The internationalisation policy plays a key role in the sample Thai HEIs. Many academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella are expanded and developed to support the tourism and hospitality field, for example, student and staff exchange programmes and cooperating with partner universities in developing the tourism and hospitality curriculum. Moreover, the representatives of the sample Thai HEIs have been asked to participate in many government activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, e.g. reviewing the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and standards and nominating ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers. These activities are in the process of transferring government policy into practice. They also strengthened the professional network between Thai HEIs and led to similar ways Thai HEIs responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Student exchange

According to the research findings, student mobility had been raised as one of the academic activities in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Supported by the work of Papatsiba (2006), student mobility serves as the key for harmonisation in higher education in the EU and also enhance the system of HEIs at the regional level. These views can also explain the ASEAN context. One of the plans of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP is to support student mobility in the areas of

tourism and hospitality within the ASEAN. Many methods of supporting mobility are used by Thai HEIs, including student exchanges with partner universities in ASEAN and using existing MOUs as channels for student exchanges and mobility. AUN-QA is also applied in Thai HEIs as another quality assurance framework. It is also one of the mechanisms for achieving their goals in student mobility. After having been developed in 1999, AUN-QA serves as the quality assurance instrument for harmonising educational standards between ASEAN member countries. The uniform higher education system is not the primary goal of AUN-QA. However, quality, quality assurance and the framework for quality assessment should be equivalent.

In the initial stages, AUN-QA had been used for its member universities; however, it is now open for non-member universities in the ASEAN (AUN, 2007). AUN-QA is not in the form of directives or a compulsory basis. It serves as a benchmark standard in helping universities who apply this standard to meet with internationally-accepted standards. AUN-QA was applied in the sample Thai HEIs as the internal quality assurance at the programme level. AUN-QA is similar to the TQF as it is outcome-based learning basis. It focuses on the relationship between the expected learning outcome, the learning strategies and student assessment. As mentioned, AUN-QA seems to be a soft mimetic pressure in triggering the homogeneity in curricula.

Education background and Professional networking of staff in Thai HEIs

Professional networking is also a force in shaping the similarity of Thai HEIs. This research indicates that coercive and mimetic pressures have played an important role in the way Thai HEIs have converged in their response to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Normative values may also play a supporting role. Normative pressures stem from the professions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The change in behaviour in order to fit in a particular group with the companionship of that group of people lead to conformity. Norms and values that developed from education can enter organisations, as well as the networking of professionals in the same area.

During the interviews, all interviewees were asked for the education background and work experience before starting the interview sessions, this information revealed that Most hold a degree in tourism and hospitality, while some have another degree, such as management. However, in term of work experience, all have a minimum of five years' experiences teaching in the tourism and hospitality areas. Some Thai HEIs considered candidates' work experience as the priority when recruiting lecturers. As suggested by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), sharing a similar education background, through universities and professional training is a way of developing common norms. Exchanging information between people who occupy similar positions also

encourages a similar orientation. In this research, exchanging work experience between managerial staff and faculty staff enhances the emergence of common norms and cultures within Thai HEIs. This research showed that academic activities related to tourism and hospitality programmes provided by Thai HEIs require specialised lecturers who have an education and employment background in the tourism and hospitality areas. These specialised lecturers have similar values and norms, gained from their similar education and working experiences. On-the-job socialisation also supports the normative pressures in Thai HEIs. However, there is no explicit evidence to prove the existence of such professional values in this research. It would be safer to explain that the interviewees in this research provided evidence of shared common professional values (Caravella, 2011).

Moreover, the research findings also expressed that the behaviour of the staff in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP are geared in the same direction. They shared the same views and perceptions towards the role of the university in producing the qualified graduates and their desired behaviour and performance to support that role of the university. Thai higher education is considered as an organisation field. It serves as a community of the actors, in this research, Thai HEIs, lecturer staff, students, graduates, OHEC and other related government agencies, who have shared the common belief and values (Scott, 2008). When the field was developed, the institutional logic has also been described, and the practice and behaviour of actors in the field are then guided by the institutional logics. According to the work of Shield and Watermeyer (2018), three principle logics of universities are expressed as autonomous, utilitarian and managerial logics. Autonomous logic refers to the traditional understanding of universities in terms of intellectual development. Utilitarian logic focuses on the role of universities in providing employable skills, while managerial logic suggests the characteristic of universities as a bureaucratic organisation. These logics are also embedded in Thai HEIs, which lead to conflicting pressure or institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011).

Although there is the institutional complexity in universities which lead to the different perception and behaviour of actors, the group of individual actors within the organisation can influence the certain logic and responding behaviour of actors. The individual actor tends to comply with a particular logic when they firmly adhere to that logic. The adherence of actors to a certain logic is based on their experiences and social network (Greenwood et al., 2011). Based on this information, the behaviour of the staff in the sample Thai HEIs adhered to the utilitarian logic of university. The perception of the staff toward the role of the university is to produce the skilled labour to support the economic growth, and they have to provide the employable skills for

their students for supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP. This perception is strengthened and developed through sharing common experiences and professional networking.

Supported by Caravella (2011), staff sharing experiences or problems related to their work during training or participation in MOTS activities are also important for the conformity of Thai HEIs. These types of participation support a shift of cultural paradigm in the field (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004). Professional networks and on-the-job socialisation are more likely to adjust the cultural paradigm of the organisation. The research findings revealed that MOTS served as the key factor in producing the values of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs. As the main responsible agency, MOTS worked closely with Thai HEIs in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. Thai HEIs were asked to participate in many MOTS activities, such as brainstorming on the pros and cons of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation, reviewing the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and standards, and appointing for the ASEAN MRA-TP cooperation and training centre. In addition, the MOTS representatives also participated in many activities at Thai HEIs. According to the interviewees, MOTS representatives were asked to be special lecturers, to build ASEAN MRA-TP awareness for both lecturers and students in the tourism and hospitality areas in many Thai HEIs. The representatives were required to provide useful information and to lead discussions related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, including the importance, the principles, as well as the implementation process in Thailand. This type of activity intended to build a common understanding of the ASEAN MRA-TP and its principles.

The research findings revealed that lecturers were also encouraged by their university and MOTS to train to be ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers. A master trainer is responsible for training the ASEAN MRA-TP national trainers. This position is certified by the ASEAN MRA-TP committee. Thai HEIs believe that having more master trainers in the university could increase their reputation. Therefore, sending their staff to be ASEAN MRA-TP master trainers was one of the activities in their ASEAN MRA-TP implementation plans. Through the training process, the participants are given the same information related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, including its goals and its implementation process, and the norms and values behind this information. Supported by Caravella (2011), the interactions among participants in this training programme, as well as the norms and values instilled by the programme, support the sharing of cultures, norms and values among Thai HEIs.

As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) noted, on-the-job socialisation process could lead to the difference among organisations when these organisations are different, and they

are in the first time in socialisation. However, this kind of socialisation acts as an isomorphic force when these organisations are similar, and they participate in several activities related to their profession. In this research, another common goal of the sample Thai HEIs was to become ASEAN MRA-TP cooperation and training centres. The three sample Thai HEIs were interested in being cooperation centres, as this would strengthen their role as leading universities in the tourism and hospitality areas in Thailand. Their interest in being cooperation centres did not come from their intention. The three sample HEIs were appointed by MOTS to be ASEAN MRA-TP cooperation centres; however, these agreements were rejected due to the changes in the ministerial cabinet. Therefore, the common interest in being the cooperation centres encouraged by MOTS is also a source of normative pressures among Thai HEIs.

As mentioned earlier, there is no evidence from this study to support the distribution of values and norms through the profession in Thai HEIs. However, the shared values and norms developed from the education background and working experiences of lecturers contribute to the pressure for conformity in Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Work socialisation, in the form of sharing and exchanging common problems or work experiences, also encourages the shift of norms within and between organisations. MOTS served as the key mechanism in spreading common values on the ASEAN MRA-TP to Thai HEIs. These values shaped the common understanding of Thai HEIs toward the ASEAN MRA-TP and also acted as another driving force for the similarity in the operations of Thai HEIs toward the ASEAN MRA-TP.

6.4 The connection between coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism in Thai HEIs

To explore Thai HEIs operations in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP, the theory of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; 1991) has been applied to create the conceptual framework for this research. The perspective of new regionalism and the international relations paradigms related to the ASEAN integration and the internationalisation of higher education have also been considered in the analysis. The conceptual framework of Frumkin and Galaskiwicz (2004) on the influence of institutional isomorphism in public sector organisations has also been applied to understand the processes in Thai HEIs better, as they are government establishments and non-profit organisations. Moreover, the conceptual framework of Joo and Halx (2012), concerning the introduction of the performance-based pay system in Korean national universities, has been explored as a framework

for understanding the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs. This research provides broad perspectives on the external and internal factors that affect the operations of universities and shapes the understanding of the institutional changes in Thai HEIs. The work of Caravella (2011) on institutional isomorphism in the institutionalisation of distance learning in higher education is also useful for this research. Caravella's (2011) research provides guidelines on the possible sources of the three isomorphic pressures in higher education. These possible sources can be applied to this research, as Caravella's work was conducted in a similar organisational field to this research.

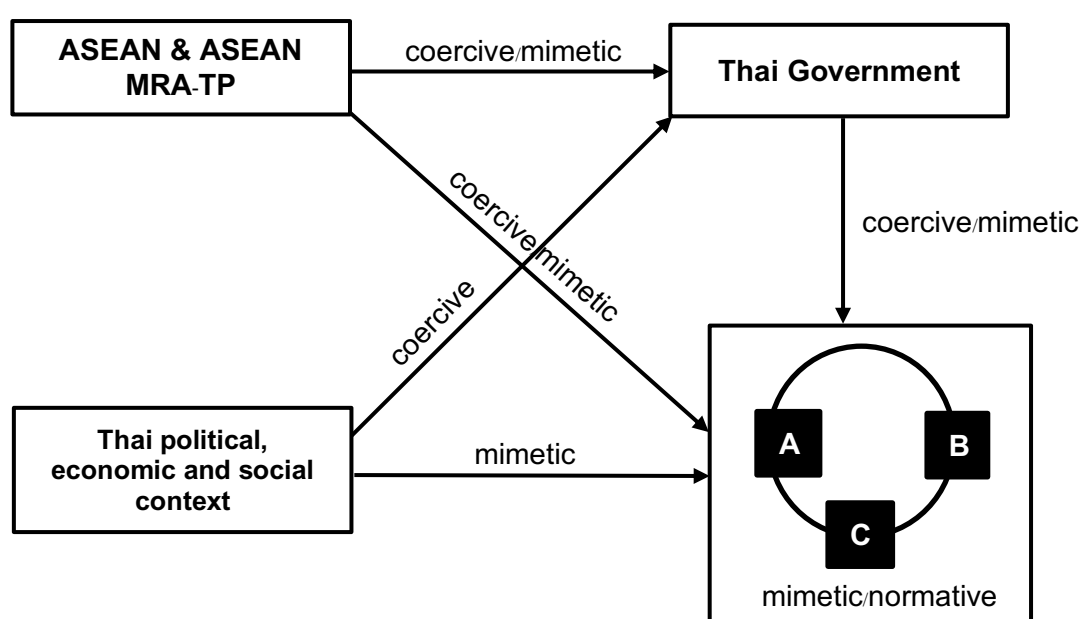


Figure 6: The institutional isomorphism process in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs

In this analysis, the research findings demonstrated that the three isomorphic forces played a key part in shaping the homogenous responses of the sample Thai HEIs toward the ASEAN MRA-TP. These three forces are closely associated with each other (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004; Joo and Halx, 2012). Figure 7 illustrates the isomorphic process in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. It can be seen that the ASEAN MRA-TP itself, the external factor, seemed to be the primary source of pressure. It manifested different types of pressures toward the internal factors of this research; the Thai government and Thai HEIs. The ASEAN MRA-TP then became the

starting point of the isomorphic process in Thai HEIs. The ASEAN MRA-TP principles and processes caused the coercive and mimetic pressures in the cycle of change in this sample of Thai HEIs. The ASEAN MRA-TP, even though it is voluntary, is considered a governmental agreement, which requires actions from ASEAN member state governments, including Thailand. Their main duty is inevitably to transfer this agreement into practice at a national level and cooperate with related government agencies to support the goal of ASEAN MRA-TP implementation. These agencies are then seen as the driving forces for the homogeneity of institutions, through their policies, regulations, accreditation and funding relations (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004). The actions of the Thai government and government agencies derived from the ASEAN MRA-TP supported a clear picture of coercive power, which was explained by Beckert (2010, p.153) as 'isomorphism induced by power'.

The ASEAN MRA-TP also reinforced the mimetic pressure toward its implementation in Thai HEIs. The principle of non-enforcement seemed to strengthen the uncertainty around the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand. This principle stems from the traditional form of cooperation in ASEAN; non-interference, with consensus and consultation. The ASEAN way reflects the unique cooperation between ASEAN member countries, which is different from other types of regional cooperation. With uncertainty about the future of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand, Thai HEIs unintentionally imitated each other in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

The Thai social context also played a role in the changes in Thai HEIs when responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP, since social process, obligation and activities are all involved in the institutionalisation process (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Thai HEIs respond to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP with the intention in gaining the recognition and building a reputation. Due to rapid economic growth, resulting in changes to the Thai social context, the role of the higher education sector as the main producer of a skilled workforce was increased to support the competitiveness of the country. These changes led to the development of the education sector in Thailand and several education reforms in the system, which served as strong coercive pressure from the government (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Caravella, 2011; Joo and Halx, 2012).

The similar structure of universities in Thailand serves as the mimetic forces stemmed from the Thai social context. The development of Thai society inevitably increased the demand for higher education, which led to the massification of universities in Thailand (Lao, 2015). These emerging universities followed the older universities in terms of structure and programmes offered, to respond well to the needs of society and

students. Each type of Thai HEI, autonomous, public and private, has their own university act, outlining their function and governance. They all share the same governing structure, having a university council as the executive body of the governance system. The similarity in the structure and the shared expectations of society towards their roles shape the same direction in the operation of Thai HEIs. These similarities are considered as a source of mimetic reinforcement.

As seen in Figure 6, the Thai government seems to be the most powerful factor in shaping the homogeneity of Thai HEI responses to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The three isomorphic pressures – coercive, mimetic and normative – stemmed from the Thai government. Through the government mandate, the TQF served as a strong coercive force in this research. The TQF functions as the internal quality assurance that all Thai HEIs are forced to follow. It is necessary for all programmes to meet the requirements of the TQF; if not, these programmes will not be approved by the Civil Services Commission, which means the degrees will not be recognised (Lao, 2015). The OHEC developed a TQF for tourism and hospitality programmes, which is used as a framework for all Thai HEIs who offer tourism and hospitality programmes. This qualification framework applied various competency standards and requirements from many countries, including ASEAN MRA-TP standards. The exercising of government power through the TQF triggered institutional changes in government organisations and non-profit organisations, such as Thai HEIs (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004). This standardised programme has been widely criticised by many Thai scholars, who claim that it supports the role of neoliberalism in Thai higher education. In producing the same products, Thai graduates have the same theoretical knowledge and skills. Thai HEIs are required to follow this framework when designing or developing their tourism and hospitality curricula. The end product, Thai graduates, are simultaneously forced to share the same knowledge and competencies. The imposition of a standardised programme is a way to strengthen the mimetic reinforcement in Thai HEIs.

Supported by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive pressure can, sometimes, be subtle and less explicit. In this research, the key mechanism of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP, the internationalisation policy, is another coercive pressure from the Thai government. Although the internationalisation policy is not in the form of a government mandate, it is clear that the success of the internationalisation in Thai HEIs stems from the strong support and persuasion from the Thai government.

Mimetic and normative pressures are also expressed in the relationship between Thai HEIs. Thai HEIs imitate each other in their structures and governing bodies. This

imitation also influences the internal administration of the universities. The research finding showed that there are slight differences in the working processes of Thai HEIs. The faster working process is apparent in the private university, while the other two types of university, public and autonomous universities, have a slower process, which is influenced by the bureaucratic system. However, this difference does not affect the overall working process of Thai HEIs. Apart from the similarity in structure and administration, the massification of higher education in Thailand resulted in high competitiveness in the higher education sector, which also encouraged the mimicking pressure between Thai HEIs. The mimetic power expresses in the sharing the common structure and administration, as well as in the similarity of programmes offered; this has shaped the homogeneity of Thai HEIs.

The normative forces in shaping the common understanding of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP comes from the fact that many staff in tourism and hospitality departments share a common educational background and common work experiences, as well as from professional socialisation. Supported by Caravella (2011), involvement in the same activities or the same organisations, or being a part of professional associations, can build common norms and values. In this research, MOTS, the government agency, plays a vital role in connecting the three sample Thai HEIs. MOTS shares norms and values on the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP through its activities, such as training to be an ASEAN MRA-TP master trainer or meeting to review the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum. Representatives from MOTS also gave special lectures on the ASEAN MRA-TP to faculty staff and students in the three sample HEIs. These common educational backgrounds and experiences caused the development of the same norms and values towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP; these are the normative forces in Thai HEIs.

As Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) noted, government organisations are more vulnerable to institutional pressures, when compared with for-profit and non-profit organisations. However, there is no significant statistical difference between government agencies and non-profit organisations in terms of the effect of the institutional environment on organisational behaviour. The findings provide clear evidence to support that idea. The three sample HEIs showed homogeneous responses towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP, even though they experience different levels of government support. Interestingly, there were anti-isomorphic forces hidden in the different types of university governance of Thai HEIs (Levy, 2006; Joo and Halx, 2012). The differences in the degree of control from the government and funding inputs can lead to divergence in the operations of Thai HEIs (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004). The private university has the owner to monitor the

operations, together with managing its own budget, should lead to differences in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. In the meantime, public and autonomous universities are still under the influence of the government. Public and autonomous universities would be more vulnerable to institutional legitimacy (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004). However, the findings revealed being a more legitimate institution, as well as government and social pressures, reduced the demand for institutional diversity.

Although all three types of isomorphic pressures are embedded in Thai HEIs, the level of conformity is different. Coercive and mimetic pressures serve as the most substantial pressures in Thai HEIs. The regulatory mandate for accreditation and the uncertainty in the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand led to the institutional adaptation perspective. The Thai HEIs then conformed to the pressures exerted from their surrounding environment to maintain legitimacy and gain reputation. Normative pressure serves as a supporting force. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggested, the three isomorphic pressures are almost indistinguishable, and they are sometimes interrelated. The findings also revealed that there was overlap between the various types of pressures in this research (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004).

6.5 Chapter Summary

This research analysis has contributed to the understanding of isomorphic pressure in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs. The convergence in the operations of Thai HEIs is the evidence to support institutional isomorphism in Thai HEIs. Representatives from the sample of Thai HEIs expressed their feelings of uncertainty over the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. They were concerned about the unclear direction of the government in transferring the policy into practice. Together with the influence of the ASEAN way, leading to the non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP, the sample Thai HEIs decided to promote the activities under the internationalisation of higher education, to support the ASEAN MRA-TP. The operational conformity of the sample HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP was not affected by their different governance structures. The three types of the university (autonomous, public and private), which have differences in budget allocation and bureaucratic dominance, surprisingly responded to the ASEAN MRA-TP in the same manner.

As indicated by Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004), government organisations and non-profit organisations tend to be more vulnerable to institutional forces and the environmental pressure for legitimacy. In the case of Thai HEIs, the ASEAN MRA-TP,

the Thai government and Thai political, economic and social contexts exerted strong influences on their operations. The strong coercive pressures, the TQF and the internationalisation of higher education are enforced and supported by the Thai government. The legal composition of the TQF also encouraged mimetic reinforcement in Thai HEIs. This qualification framework led to the same structure and the same subjects being taught in tourism and hospitality programmes offered by Thai HEIs, which led to similar outputs. These standardised programmes respond well to the ASEAN MRA-TP curriculum and standards, as they were designed by using the ASEAN MRA-TP as a reference for tourism and hospitality standards.

Another vital source of mimetic pressure is the non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP. When the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thai HEIs is optional, the importance of it is lessened. The operations of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP then relied on academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella. The Thai social context also exerted strong pressure on the operations of Thai HEIs. The same organisational structure and administration of today Thai HEIs are developed by the changes in the Thai socioeconomic context. The expectations of Thai society towards the role of Thai HEIs as providing job training also encouraged the operation of Thai HEIs in responding to any incoming challenges, including the ASEAN MRA-TP. Normative pressures were developed from similar education backgrounds and on-the-job socialisation of the faculty staff. An anti-isomorphism force existed in the differences in budget sources and bureaucratic influence; however, this had little effect. The strong pressures from the impact factors – the ASEAN MRA-TP, the Thai government and Thai social contexts – reinforced the homogeneity of Thai HEI operations for the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

In sum, coercive and mimetic pressures seem to be stronger in shaping the homogeneity of Thai HEIs in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Enforcement from the regulatory power and the feeling of uncertainty towards the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP encouraged Thai HEIs to promote existing activities under the internationalisation umbrella. The Thai social context was a key accelerator in shaping the operations of Thai HEIs. The shift of power from state-driven to market-driven since the 1980s has directly affected the Thai higher education sector. This circumstance led to the work of Thai HEIs in responding to the needs and expectations of Thai society. However, the government still has a strong influence on higher education policy (Lao, 2015). The legal imposition or the encouragement of the government dominated the work of Thai HEIs and led to the conformity in the operation of Thai HEIs.

The study of the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on the operations of Thai HEIs provides a better understanding of the operations of Thai HEIs. The convergence of three isomorphic pressures – coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures – shapes the homogeneity in the sample Thai HEIs. The similarity of the sample Thai HEIs reflected the strong relationship between the Thai government and Thai society and the operations of the sample Thai HEIs. It also reflected the views and expectations of Thai society towards the role of Thai HEIs. This kind of information helps us understand how Thai HEIs cope with the international challenge and the importance of the government's directive regarding the operations of Thai HEIs. The last chapter will summarise the key information on this research. Contributions to knowledge, limitations, and future recommendations will also be presented.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This chapter summarises the key research findings and offers recommendations for further investigation. In addition, it explains the intention of conducting the study and obtaining its results. This is followed by a re-examination of the research questions to substantiate the thesis' overall argument. The contributions of this study are also reconsidered to understand the manner in which the theories described in chapter two explain the research phenomenon. Further, the implications of the work for policy and practice are provided. Lastly, the obstacles in conducting this research and further research recommendations are presented.

7.1 Introduction

This case-based research has been developed based on the interest of the researcher on the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai HEIs when it serves as a new actor in the higher education sector. The idea of this research emerged from the researcher working as a government officer responsible for the higher education cooperation under the ASEAN framework. As tourism and hospitality are considered mainstays of the Thai economy, ASEAN MRA-TP, an agreement on the free movement of tourism professionals within ASEAN was selected as the main topic of this research with particular relevance for Thai HEIs as suppliers of labour market talent. The highly competitive labour market in tourism, together with the expectations of Thai society, is becoming a vital focal point for the Thai higher education sector.

On the evidence captured through this research, it is understandable for Thai HEIs to take action to ensure that their graduates are well prepared and qualified for the ASEAN tourism labour market. Moreover, this investigation has been conducted within a transitional period. Thailand is in the process of full ASEAN integration and accordingly enjoys an opportunity to observe and problematise institutional as well as sectorial responses to policy implementation and development. Consideration of how Thai HEIs perceive and respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP will facilitate the successful integration of future policy for the Thai higher education sector.

The study has sought to observe the impacts of ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai HEIs. The main research question addressed was: “**How Thai HEIs change in responding to ASEAN MRA-TP?**” Three contributory subsidiary questions asked:

- **What factors affect the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP?**
- **What is the role of government in the context of Thai HEIs responding to ASEAN MRA-TP?**
- **What variation, if any, have Thai HEIs with different types of governance experienced in their response to the ASEAN MRA-TP?**

Three Thai HEIs with different types of university governance were selected as case studies. Data collection was conducted between April and July 2016, which was the transitional period for full ASEAN integration. A theory of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) was considered for providing foundational information on the kinds of pressures affecting Thai HEIs. The study of Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) on institutional isomorphism in public sector organisations was also applied to understand the tendencies of change in Thai HEIs when faced with environmental pressures. Additionally, the conceptual framework of Joo and Halx (2012) and Caravella (2011) was drawn onto elucidate the key factors (levers and triggers) affecting the operational response of Thai HEIs to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Understanding the interplay of these factors has helped elicit how sampled institutions have responded to the challenges and demands of ASEAN MRA-TP

7.2 Key findings

According to Figure 6, the study found that the sample of Thai HEIs exhibited unity in response to the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP even though they are different in terms of their governance and the extent of their support from government. ASEAN MRA-TP, as a product of ASEAN, seems to be a lesser concern for the sampled Thai HEIs. The failure of government policy in persuading Thai HEIs to implement the ASEAN MRA-TP has been a significant factor in explaining the similarity of the operations of the sample Thai HEIs. The absence of a mandatory ruling on ASEAN MRA-TP also reduced its importance in their view. Thai HEIs

subsequently demonstrated a conservative approach by allowing the ASEAN MRA-TP to fold discretely within a more generalist internationalisation policy. As a result, policy on internationalisation of universities became the key mechanism for responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Moreover, a harmonised response from the sampled Thai HEIs is explained by an indigenous logic and the expectations of Thai society regarding the role of universities in responding to the needs of a service economy.

This research reveals that the ASEAN MRA-TP exhibits a strong influence on the work of Thai HEIs and the Thai government. Although the ASEAN MRA-TP is an agreement at a regional level, its lack of mandatory implementation policy has lessened its importance. In fact, agreements under the ASEAN framework stem from the principles of non-interference, consensus and consultation. These principles are also influential in the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Thailand exploited a loophole to delay signing the agreement, which led to widespread criticism of the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP among stakeholders. However, when the agreement was signed, it meant that the Thai government had agreed to implement the ASEAN MRA-TP at a national level. The Thai government thus exercised its power in both direct and indirect ways. Policies related to the ASEAN MRA-TP have been formulated, but the method of implementing these policies still requires development. The confusion about the agency responsible for the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand is one such area that needs development. Overlapping work within Thai government agencies was mentioned many times by the interviewees, which reflects the ambiguous direction of the government and explains the ambivalence of universities towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Furthermore, non-enforcement of the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP among education providers seems to make the situation worse. The Thai government decided to persuade Thai HEIs to support the ASEAN MRA-TP instead of requiring them to implement it through a legal obligation. The relationship between the Thai government and universities then assumed the form of encouragement and seeking cooperation. When their obligation to the Thai government is weakened, the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP is reduced in the view of Thai HEIs. Nonetheless,

the institutions then decided to follow the government's direction and applied policies within their operations. Thus, benefits accrued by gaining acceptance in the government sector and society at large are the incentives attracting Thai HEIs to follow the government's. The Thai HEI staff expressed their concerns regarding the ASEAN MBA-TP. They believed that this kind of mobility could bring both advantages and disadvantages to Thai HEIs. Therefore, the government's policy and plan regarding this matter are necessary for Thai HEIs to form strategic plans. However, the unclear direction on the ASEAN MBA-TP implementation was witnessed by the interviewees. The operations of the government sector regarding the ASEAN MBA-TP are vague, and cooperation is lacking, which creates the impression that the ASEAN MBA-TP is not very important. The Thai government seemed to fail in transferring the ASEAN MBA-TP policies into practice and its failure to mandate Thai HEIs to implement the agreement. However, its power in monitoring the quality of tourism and hospitality programmes and encouraging the internationalisation of higher education became a useful mechanism with which lead to unity in Thai HEIs' operations. TQF in tourism and hospitality programmes, mandated by OHEC, has functioned as the quality assurance framework applied to all Thai HEIs. This framework is the main reason why the tourism and hospitality programmes of these institutions are appropriate to the ASEAN MBA-TP curriculum and standard.

Interviewees also identified internationalisation of universities as a suitable measure to support the ASEAN MBA-TP. With the long development of internationalisation in Thai higher education, the well-prepared operations of Thai HEIs under the internationalisation umbrella support the ASEAN MBA-TP as activities under regional cooperation. These mechanisms have been developed to support change in the Thai context. Therefore, the Thai political, economic and social context is an interesting factor in shaping the conformity of Thai HEIs.

In this research, Thai political, economic and social contexts displayed a strong influence on the role and operations of Thai HEIs. The role of universities, much like the vast majority of universities in the neoliberal epoch, is increasingly exclusively rationalised on the basis of servicing Thai economy and the modernisation of society. Government become the key actor in managing the change in the higher education sector through reforming the Thai education system. The various actions of

government toward the higher education sector enhanced the quantity and quality of higher education as well as the role of universities. In the perception of Thai society, Thai universities became the symbol of job training which guarantees career advancement and a good life. Together with reform in compulsory education and free basic education, demand for higher education has increased, leading to the massification of higher education. Newer universities have imitated older universities, the more legitimated institutions, in both their offered programmes and internal structure in order to meet the needs of Thai society. These imitations of Thai universities, for this research, served as the foundation for the similarity responses of Thai HEIs toward the ASEAN MRA-TP.

The network between the faculty of the sampled universities and the shared values and background related to tourism and hospitality have also encouraged conformity in the response of Thai HEIs. The same educational and working experiences as well as the on-the-job socialisation, shape similar perceptions of the agreement. As the tourism and hospitality field is unique and requires specialised skills and knowledge, the lecturers in the present sample mostly hold degrees in tourism and hospitality along with direct experience of working in the tourism industry. These backgrounds orient their views in the same direction on the less importance of ASEAN MRA-TP and the probability of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand. Moreover, participation in many government projects and activities related to the ASEAN MRA-TP has also cultivated consistent values and norms. These professionals have chances to share their experiences, views and ideas with each other, including information from the same source, MOTS. These circumstances lead to uniform attitudes towards the ASEAN MRA-TP and homogeneity of the operations of Thai HEIs regarding it.

This consistency in reaction to the ASEAN MRA-TP is evidenced in the form of institutional strategy. Different types of institutional governance did not affect this work. The distinctive differences between these three types of universities; the influence of government bureaucracy and budget allocation, affected their internal processes and management but not their direction and strategy in response to the agreement, which exhibited homogeneity. Ambivalence from the government in the implementation process for the ASEAN MRA-TP generated a feeling of uncertainty in Thai HEIs. In light of the non-enforcement of the ASEAN MRA-TP principle, these institutions then

decided to promote their existing activities under the internationalisation umbrella, as they believed in their well-prepared strategies and the solid foundation of their internationalisation policy.

7.3 Contribution To Knowledge

Empirical contribution

This thesis has explored the impacts of the ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai HEIs, particularly on the delivery of taught programmes in tourism. Moreover, the changes in Thai HEIs in responding to this challenge has been identified. So far, most studies on the impact of ASEAN on higher education have focused only on ASEAN as the regional organisation. The higher education sector was used as the main topic in most research of ASEAN while the topic related to the universities were neglected. The roles and operation of Thai HEIs as the key agents in producing skilled workers have been overlooked. Moreover, there was less research on the ASEAN activities. The impacts of ASEAN activities, such as ASEAN MRAs, on Thai HEIs have been neglected.

This research has sought to respond to this knowledge gap, which has predominantly focused on the free movement of skilled labour under the ASEAN MRA-TP. Studying the impacts of each ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai universities can lead to a more holistic understanding of the impact of ASEAN in other contexts.

With regard to the perceptions and experiences of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP, this perspective can provide valuable knowledge on many aspects. The homogeneity of the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP is explicit in this research. As Thai HEIs have been classified into three groups based on their governance, the differences in terms of governance and support from the government are considered to be the anti-isomorphism hidden in this research. Interestingly, the research findings reveal that the autonomy of a university does not have a strong influence on the operation of Thai HEIs. Each of the three types of universities has similar strategies and activities to support the ASEAN MRA-TP even though they are different in terms of budget and internal management and, especially, are free from the government's authority.

This kind of result also illustrates the strong relationship between the Thai government and Thai HEIs. Although the influence of government in Thai HEIs was reduced for their flexibility, the operations of Thai HEIs are rely on government policy and regulations. However, it is important to understand that this research has been conducted during the transition period. Throughout the lifespan of this research, ASEAN MRA-TP has been shown as only partially implemented. The policy and plan and direction of government were then played a vital role in the direction and operations of Thai HEIs.

This research has expressed the social value of Thai higher education. The value and expectation of society have a strong effect on the roles of Thai HEIs. Thai higher education has been considered as the symbol of career advancement. This research maintained that this value is still embedded in Thai society, and it has a strong effect on Thai higher education sector which can answer the subsidiary research question on the factor affected the operations of Thai HEIs. In this regard, this research revealed that Thai HEIs have little interest in the ASEAN MRA-TP; however, they still have to respond to this challenge. The perception of Thai HEIs as institutions that exist for job training was embedded in Thai society and served as one of the driving forces for Thai HEIs in response to any upcoming challenges, including the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Theoretical contribution

After considering the research findings, the concept of institutional isomorphism from DiMaggio and Powell (1983) helps understand the conformity of the operations of Thai HEIs in their response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. It not only helps identify the key characteristic of the pressure that shapes the work of Thai HEIs but also supports the discussion of this research in terms of Thai HEIs' response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Moreover, the study on institutional isomorphism in public sector organisations by Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) is considered in order to understand the tendency towards isomorphism pressures in Thai HEIs, as government agencies and non-profit organisations, when responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The framework of Joo and Halx (2012) on the institutionalisation of performance-pay based systems in Korean national universities and the work of Caravella (2011) are also applied to develop the conceptual framework of this research. The findings confirmed that the government

agencies and universities tend to conform to the surrounding pressures as suggested by Frumkin and Galaskiewicz. In the meantime, the key actors who played a leading role in the work of Caravella (2011) and Joo and Halx (2012) were also shown in this research, which are the government sector and the social context.

As Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) discussed, three isomorphism pressures play a vital role in understanding the operations of Thai HEIs towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The research results reveal that the sample Thai HEIs have a homogeneous response towards the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP even though they are different in terms of university governance and budget support. The coercive pressure in the form of government mandates and persuasion, TQF, and internationalisation policy, was not the sole force that affected the operations of Thai HEIs. In the meantime, mimetic and normative forces also played an interesting role in the context of what I learnt from the sample institutions. The non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP and the universal logic of a university is to produce a qualified workforce and support the competitiveness of the country, and this seems to be the crucial driving force for creating the mimetic and normative behaviour of Thai HEIs.

The coercive and mimetic forces seem to be the more substantial pressure in shaping the homogeneity of Thai HEIs (Joo and Halx, 2012). The mandatory power of the Thai government in the quality assurance of higher education through the TQF and the legal imposition on the internationalisation policy serves as the main source of coercive pressure. In the meantime, the influence of the TQF in shaping the unity of the tourism and hospitality programme and the non-enforcement principle of the ASEAN MRA-TP also supports the conformity of Thai HEIs in the form of mimetic reinforcement. Interestingly, the implementation of the TQF in Thai HEIs demonstrates the overlapping of isomorphic forces, as explained by Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004). The evidence of normative pressure might not be represented clearly in this research. However, it encourages similar operations of the sample of Thai HEIs through socialisation in professional life and common education backgrounds and working experiences.

This research also supported the arguments of Frumkin and Galaskiewicz (2004) that government agencies and non-profit organisations tend to respond well to institutional

pressures compared to for-profit organisations. The owner and performance indicators are the main factors of vulnerability.

Both organisations did not have the real owner or even the performance indicators to control their operations. Compared to this research, Thai HEIs have the main role in producing a workforce who have skills and competencies to support the needs of the labour market and the country's economic competitiveness. With this role, it is necessary for Thai HEIs to adapt and change to be in line with the government's direction without worrying about profits or positional gain. The positional gain the sampled universities seem most concerned with is reputation, as this is what helps attract more students and cooperation with foreign universities. The role of government as a regulatory agency affects the changes in government agencies and non-profit organisations. The policies and strategies of government towards government agencies also have a spillover effect towards the operations of non-profit organisations, which is similar to the result of this research.

This research reveals that it is difficult to find the difference in the vulnerability to the isomorphic pressures in government agencies and non-profit organisations (Frumkin and Galaskiewicz, 2004). A vital factor in supporting the operations of Thai HEIs falls to the influence of Thai political, economic, and social contexts. High expectations towards the role of higher education as job training and the need for skilled labour in the labour market encourage the massification and reform of Thai higher education. Quality assurance in Thai HEIs is controlled by OHEC and also encourages similarities across Thai HEIs. These historical and social pressures, as well as government forces, serve as the support for anti-isomorphic resistance and demand for institutional diversity (Joo and Halx, 2012).

Methodological contribution

The main methodological contribution is reflected in the experiences gained through the techniques used in this research. The research provides a contribution in terms of the kinds of methodological etiquette necessary for conducting empirical research in Southeast Asian contexts, where access to and the handling of research populations is ostensibly unlike that of Western approaches. In Thailand, the traditional way of Thai government agencies in asking permission for interviewing is still required. Official letters to university presidents and the interviewees are necessary for collecting data.

This similar etiquette is also applied in other South East Asian countries. This information is then helpful for other researchers who intend to conduct the research in South East Asian countries.

7.4 Implications of research

This research has investigated changes in Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. It also specifically focused on the roles of Thai HEIs as the producers of graduates in the tourism and hospitality sector in supporting the free movement of tourism professionals under the conditions of the agreement. Much research in this area has examined how professionals or graduates cope with the impact of the AEC or the readiness of Thai graduates for it. Very little, however, has looked at the way in which Thai HEIs have responded to the ASEAN MRAs. Moreover, previous MRA investigations have focused on the preparation and competencies of Thai graduates without mentioning the roles and activities of Thai HEIs in responding to this challenge. Therefore, this thesis demonstrates uniqueness in aiming to understand better the reflective views of institutions on the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP. This study paid attention to the implementation of ASEAN MRA TP at the institutional level. In addition, the findings also have the potential to benefit both the government sector and Thai HEIs in understanding the views and operations of each area in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Thus far, the findings have revealed the homogeneity of the operations of Thai HEIs in response to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Drawing on the concept of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), three isomorphic pressures play a significant role in shaping the similar responses of Thai HEIs. Although the non-enforcement of ASEAN MRA-TP reduced its importance, Thai HEIs have been forced by other factors to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The research revealed interesting results about the role of the government sector in Thai HEIs. The government still has a strong influence on the operations of Thai HEIs. According to the perception of Thai society, Thai HEIs serve as instruments by which to obtain better employment; this perception is another driving force for the response of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. The uncertainty of the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand strengthened the importance of the internationalisation of Thai HEIs.

Impacts on Policy and Practice for the Thai Government

The impact on the policy and practice of the government sector is explicit. At the regional level, the evidence of the principle of non-interference and decision making by consensus in the ASEAN MRA-TP showed the strong influence of the principle of ASEAN on government activities. The government sector is aware of these principles when proposing new activities or making decisions to participate in any activities under ASEAN.

At the national level, the findings highlight the impact of the government as the key driving force shaping the operation of Thai HEIs. As mentioned above, much previous analysis has focused on the overall preparation of the Thai higher education sector or suggested important issues that it needs to improve upon. Very few studies have exposed adverse views, the operations of Thai HEIs, their views towards upcoming challenges and the work of the government sector, or their expectations of the role of the government sector. This research fills this gap by uncovering the in-depth views of Thai HEI staff towards the upcoming ASEAN MRA-TP. It has also revealed HEIs' expectations of the role and direction of the government sector in response to the agreement. Moreover, this research was conducted during the early period of the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand, thus reflecting a response at the point of policy implementation in the contexts of both the government and Thai HEIs. The study accordingly provides insight into how the government might better work with HEIs to implement the new policy successfully. Therefore, the findings of this study can be used as supporting information for the government when they formulate new policies and venture in new directions to address similar challenges. The findings could also be used to develop the existing policy and direction to meet the needs and requirements of the operation sector.

Moreover, the results reveal the similarity of Thai HEIs' operations despite their differences in terms of university governance. This point reflects the effect of the government on university autonomy. For over 20 years, the Thai government put more effort into establishing new autonomous universities and transforming public universities into autonomous universities. The primary goal of the government regarding autonomous universities in Thailand is flexibility and existing outside bureaucratic control to achieve improved performance. However, this research revealed the opposite; the government still plays a dominant role in the operations of

all types of Thai HEIs. Therefore, the government might not be an important factor for the flexibility and improved performance of Thai HEIs. Thus, pushing public universities to be autonomous universities might not be a suitable way to improve the performance of Thai HEIs.

Impacts on Policy and Practice for HEIs

The importance of university internationalisation policy is explicit in this research. This result benefits both the Thai government and Thai HEIs in terms of the suggestions made with regards to the policy formulation and implementation. The sample institutions expressed their response by stressing the importance of internationalisation policy and international cooperation, believing that activities under such policy can respond well to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The policy on internationalisation of university at the national level should be strengthened. The Thai government should play the leading role as a facilitator for any activities under the internationalisation policy and budget supporter. Meanwhile, the activities under the internationalisation policy of the university should be expanded to cover all subjects as the main strategy for reacting to any international agendas of Thai HEIs.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

During the study period, many difficulties and concerns emerged as limitations of this work. Many problems often interrupted the progress of the research. Sampling, access to sample universities and interviewees, and the suggestion of language barrier in the context of undertaking fieldwork are some of the obstacles that I dealt with. The generalisation of the findings and the comparability of the three sample case studies deserve the greatest concern. A combination of these issues can present a threat, which led to minor and major problems in conducting this research.

The first issue was that of sampling. Although the cases were selected to support the objectives of this investigation, a limitation is manifested in the uneven number of the representative groups. After grouping the Thai HEIs, the different numbers of institutions in each group was shown, pointing out the unequal chance of being selected. Nonetheless, the uneven size of each group did not affect the selection, as I used the number of students enrolled in tourism and hospitality programmes as the main criterion. The university with the highest number of such students in each group

was selected as a case study for this research. The universities with the highest number of students involved in the tourism and hospitality sector were believed to exhibit the greatest enthusiasm in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP, since it serves as a significant challenge and affects a large number of their students.

Access to the sample universities and interviewees can also be seen as a limitation of this research. In consideration of tradition in the Thai context, an official letter containing the research information was required to be submitted to each university, asking their permission for interviews and requesting contact with the interviewees. In this case, the interviewees were selected and assigned by the head of the university. Some might argue that these interviewees may not have been able to provide useful enough information for this research, making the data obtained unreliable. I provided important information related to this study in the official letter to build trust as well as citing the qualifications of the expected interviewees. In the official letter, I mentioned that they should be teaching or managerial staff who have at least four years of experience in teaching in the field of tourism and hospitality as well as areas related to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Further, I confirmed the qualifications of the interviewees by asking them about their work experience before commencing the interview sessions. The data gained from these interviewees showed that they all have the desired knowledge and experience related to the ASEAN MRA-TP.

Furthermore, the interview process in this investigation was not always conducted smoothly. The slow authorisation and establishment of contact with the interviewees presented key obstacles. After sending the official letter, the long process of authorisation was effected by each of the case study universities. This impediment can be characterised as a normal situation in the Thai context. I, who faced this kind of situation many times in the capacity of a government officer, made sincere efforts to follow up and recheck with the universities. The status of authorisation letter was checked and reconfirmed over the phone to make sure that permission was granted and that the interviewees had been assigned.

After that, I still had a hard time contacting the assigned interviewees to make interview appointments. Since they each had a busy schedule, the time slots for interviewees in the same university were scattered. Worse, deferment and cancellation of appointments happened both before and during interview sessions. Many sessions were interrupted by some urgent mission on the part of the

interviewee. Some of them asked to postpone their sessions, while others were cancelled. Though for many interviewees, the researcher had to travel to a provincial area to undertake the interview, some of them asked for a cancellation one hour before the meeting and refused to settle a new appointment. These problems delayed the study, as I had to extend the period of data collection. I tried my best to reconfirm slots with the interviewees one day before the interview sessions to make sure that they were available and willing to participate. Rearranging the times and dates of these appointments occurred several times after interviews had to be postponed or cancelled. In light of the busy schedule of some interviewees, the researcher decided to ignore some interview questions to save their time and conducted phone interviews to clarify some issues. Other interviews were cancelled as the participants were unable to provide an available time slot.

In addition, a language barrier was an important limitation of this work. I conducted the interviews using the Thai language in order to attain a better understanding between me and the interviewees concerning the ideas and perceptions that they wanted to explain. Most of the documentation used in this research was also published in the Thai language. Therefore, the context of translating findings from the Thai language based on the context of an English readership was my real challenge. The translation of the research questions and related concepts into Thai, then of the information gained from the interviews into English, led to the erosion of essence and cultural nuance in terms of both language and context in what the interviewees tried to explain during the interviews. This issue can constitute a problem, especially since some Thai words do not have a direct equivalent in English. In this case, I was aware of the difference in language and the loss of tone and mood in the interview transcripts. Nonetheless, I translated all of the documents and interview transcripts used in this study as I was able to understand the research context and language adequately. I tried my best to decipher all the words and meanings that the interviewees intended to communicate and compared the details of her English version with the Thai transcripts at all stages of translation.

The generalisation of research and comparability of three case studies required more attention. Although, this research is an observation of one country context; it is aimed at achieving the analytical generalisation instead of a statistical generalisation. Therefore, by sharing the same natural setting - ASEAN MRA-TP - the result of this

study provides an overview of the phenomenon that might happen in other ASEAN member countries. Although it might be different in context and condition of each member countries, the universal logic in being the key catalyst towards producing the required workforce to serve the needs of labour market shaped the direction of ASEAN HEIs in supporting the needs of ASEAN MRA-TP, including the development of similar academic activities. In order to attain the comparability of three case studies, the uneven number of interviewees in each case study can also be another area of limitation. However, they adequately explain the working environment and condition in each university. They all worked within the same institutional setting, Thai HEIs, and dealt with various issues related to the ASEAN MRA-TP. The interviewees in each case studies comprised of staff at a managerial level and lecturers which can provide a complete picture of the operation of their university. It also supports the main objective of this research in understanding the operations of Thai HEIs towards ASEAN MRA-TP despite the difference in university governance.

7.6 Further research suggestion

After considering this study's results and limitations, further research is suggested to strengthen the findings and expand on another interesting area related to ASEAN integration.

First, future research should address limitations on generalisation. As this research is related to the ASEAN MRA-TP, which affects all ASEAN member countries, comparative investigation of the operation of HEIs in other ASEAN member countries concerning the agreement is suggested in order to compare the reactions of each member country and understand the key factors in each. This kind of research might also provide a clear picture of the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP expressed through the views of HEIs throughout ASEAN member countries.

Second, further research on the impact of the ASEAN MRA-TP on Thai HEIs is recommended as this research was conducted at the beginning of the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The uncertain direction and situation related to the ASEAN MRA-TP have been reported in this research. Therefore, conducting the current research with the same populations might reflect the different views and perspectives of Thai HEI staff towards the ASEAN MRA-TP and the work of the

government. Moreover, this kind of research can provide a better understanding of the development of the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in Thailand as well as the direction of the government.

Third, further research could be conducted that focuses on vocational education. As discussed with the representative of MOTS vocational institutions have been mentioned as among the main actors in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP. Many Thai vocational institutions have improved their tourism and hospitality programmes by focusing more on skills training than theoretical knowledge. These skills and competencies are necessary for ASEAN MRA-TP candidates, as they are the main criteria for becoming ASEAN tourism professionals. The different views and activities of vocational institutions concerning the ASEAN MRA-TP are an interesting theme for further research, as they can facilitate understanding of Thai educational contexts as well as of the expectations and support of the Thai government for different levels of education.

Lastly, further studies could cover other aspects of the labour movement. The ASEAN agreement on free labour movement covered seven other areas: accountancy, engineering, architecture, surveying, nursing, medical practice and dental practice. Hence, an examination of the preparation of Thai HEIs in each area also assumes significance, particularly where movement in these sectors is related to professional councils and local laws and regulations. The operations of Thai HEIs in relation to these movements should be different from those involving the ASEAN MRA-TP and understanding them may bring benefits to the government sector in formulating related policy and adjusting norms.

7.7 Chapter Summary

According to the research findings, it can be taken that the feeling of uncertainty on the success of the ASEAN MRA-TP in Thailand supports the homogeneous response of Thai HEIs. The lack of confidence in the Thai government and related agencies also reduces the concern of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. The disconnect between the higher education policy and ASEAN strengthened the universities' perception of the reduced importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP. The work of universities in supporting the utilitarian institutional logic in producing the required workforce for

the labour market (Shields and Watermeyer, 2018) encouraged identical activities in Thai HEIs. Thai HEIs then decided to maintain the activities under an internationalisation policy in order to support the ASEAN MRA-TP, as Thai HEIs recognised that these regional activities remained under an international aspect and that the solid background the internationalisation policy is a good enough response for the ASEAN MRA-TP. Continuing some academic activities, such as student and staff exchanges, joint research and programmes, and the expansion of these activities to tourism and hospitality areas are some of the measures that Thai HEIs applied for ASEAN MRA-TP.

This research expressed an interesting idea on the relationship between the government as well as the operation of Thai HEIs. Although the Thai government encourages the autonomy of universities both in academics and administration, the precise direction and policy of the government and allied agencies are still crucial for the operation of Thai HEIs. In this case, the mandatory application of force from the government towards the ASEAN MRA-TP implementation in educational providers is seen as an interesting factor in changing the operation of Thai HEIs towards the ASEAN MRA-TP. It can augment the confidence of Thai HEIs in the importance of the ASEAN MRA-TP and other activities supported by the ASEAN MRA-TP might vary by not only retaining the academic activities under the internationalisation umbrella.

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Appendix A

Interview questions (University managerial staff)

1. What are the challenges, benefits and threats of the ASEAN MRA-TP for Thai HEIs ?
2. How the ASEAN MRA-TP affect your university ?
3. What factors affect the operations of your university in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
4. In your opinion, what kind of changes might happen in your university in order to support the ASEAN MRA-TP ? (i.e., its roles, the increasing number of students or short courses and training offered)
5. What are your policies and plans to support the labour movement in ASEAN ?
6. How is your university currently doing to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
7. What are the additional activities your university plan to do to seize the opportunities from the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
8. What do you think about government policies and plan in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ? Is there any policies and plans to support the operations of university in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
9. What is OHEC doing to enhance your university's participation in developing and implementing policies related to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
10. What are your expectations towards the work of government in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ? What kind of supports do you need from the government ?
11. In your opinion, can the autonomy of university in term of financial support impact the operations of university in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?

Interview questions (University faculty staff)

1. How the ASEAN MRA-TP affect your university ?
2. What factors affect the operations of your university in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
3. In your opinion, what kind of changes might happen in your university in order to support the ASEAN MRA-TP ? (i.e., its roles, the increasing number of students or short courses and training offered)
4. What is your policies and plans to support the labour movement in ASEAN ?
5. How is your university currently doing to support the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
6. Is there any relevance between the ACCSTP and CATC and your tourism and hospitality programme ? If yes, please clarify.
7. In your opinion, will ACCSTP and CATC help to improve the standard and quality of your tourism and hospitality programme ?
8. In your opinion, how your university is doing to follow the policies and plan of your university in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
9. In your opinion, can the autonomy of university in term of financial support impact the operations of university in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
10. In your opinion, what are additional activities needed for your university in order to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
11. What are your expectations towards the work of government in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ? What kind of supports do you need from the government ?

Interview questions (OHEC officer in policy and plan)

1. What are the challenges of the ASEAN MRA-TP towards the roles and operations of Thai HEIs ?
2. What are the policies and plans of OHEC to support the ASEAN integration and the labour movement in ASEAN ?
3. What factors are required to consider when formulating the policies and plan to support the integration of ASEAN ?
4. Did OHEC has any mechanisms or measures to encourage the policy implementation in Thai HEIs ?
5. In your opinion, what are the limitations and obstacles of Thai HEIs in implementing OHEC policies and plans ?
6. In your opinion, how different of the implementation of OHEC policies and plans from the different types of governance of Thai HEIs ?
7. From the question 6, if there any differences, what is the key factor for the different way of policy implementation ?
8. What is your expectation, in the view of OHEC, towards the roles and operations of Thai HEIs in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?

Interview questions (OHEC officer in standard and quality)

1. What are the challenges of the ASEAN MRA-TP towards the roles and operations of Thai HEIs ?
2. How OHEC respond to the ACCSTP and CATC of the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
3. In your opinion, how TQF in tourism and hospitality programme and ACCSTP and CATC are related ?
4. From the question 3, If there are any differences between these standards, please clarify. Do you have any plan to develop the TQF in tourism and hospitality programme ? If yes, How is your plan ?
5. In your opinion, Is TQF in tourism and hospitality programme can accelerate the quality of tourism and hospitality programme of Thai HEIs ? if yes, please clarify
6. What are the limitations and obstacles of Thai HEIs in applying TQF ?
7. As Thai HEIs are different in terms of governance, is there any differences of the three types of Thai HEIs in applying the TQF ? if yes, please clarify.
8. What is your expectation, in the view of OHEC, towards the roles and operations of Thai HEIs in respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?

Interview questions (MOTS officer)

1. What are the policies and plans of OHEC to support the ASEAN integration and the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
2. How is MOTS doing to support the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
3. In your opinion, what are the roles of higher education sector in supporting the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
4. In your opinion, what are the challenges for Thai HEIs after the signing of the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
5. What are the factors affected the roles and operations of Thai HEIs ? and How are they affected ?
6. In your opinion, Is the ASEAN MRA-TP can force to the change in the roles of Thai HEIs ? If yes, please clarify
7. As the main responsible agency in the implementation of the ASEAN MRA-TP, what is your expectation towards the higher education sector (OHEC and Thai HEIs) in responding to the ASEAN MRA-TP ?
8. In your opinion, what are the important issues required for higher education sector to develop and operate in order to respond to the ASEAN MRA-TP

Appendix B

Number of enrolled students in tourism and hospitality programme in Thai HEIs (as of January 2016)

This information was used for selecting the case study for this research.

University	No. of Students	University	No. of Students	University	No. of Students
Autonomous 1	3,266	Public 15	1,079	Public 39	64
Autonomous 2	1,012	Public 16	326	Public 40	275
Autonomous 3	375	Public 17	198	Public 41	169
Autonomous 4	253	Public 18	160	Public 42	105
Autonomous 5	964	Public 19	288	Public 43	221
Autonomous 6	618	Public 20	678	Public 44	132
Autonomous 7	12	Public 21	1,292	Public 45	598
Autonomous 8	1,019	Public 22	666	Public 46	221
Autonomous 9	339	Public 23	175	Public 47	703
Autonomous 10	2,251	Public 24	360	Public 48	2,453
Public 1	202	Public 25	213	Public 49	971
Public 2	494	Public 26	643	Public 50	90
Public 3	2,497	Public 27	283	Public 51	736
Public 4	884	Public 28	307	Public 52	33
Public 5	1,276	Public 29	524	Public 53	184
Public 6	1,439	Public 30	259	Private 1	2,647
Public 7	243	Public 31	776	Private 2	802
Public 8	162	Public 32	75	Private 3	91
Public 9	824	Public 33	438	Private 4	78
Public 10	347	Public 34	434	Private 5	69
Public 11	923	Public 35	111	Private 6	54
Public 12	622	Public 36	1,053	Private 7	333
Public 13	535	Public 37	116	Private 8	100
Public 14	784	Public 38	110	Private 9	363

University	No. of Students	University	No. of Students	University	No. of Students
Private 10	43	Private 14	957	Private 18	1,108
Private 11	347	Private 15	347	Private 19	226
Private 12	187	Private 16	1,424	Private 20	576
Private 13	1,012	Private 17	561	Private 21	3,292

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form for participation in research entitled
**“The impacts of ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism
Professionals (MRA-TP) on Thai higher education institutions”**

Before agreeing to participate in this research, I encourage you to read the following explanation of this study. This research is being a part of Doctoral dissertation and has been approved by University of Bath Ethic committee. The statement in this form explains the purpose and procedure of this study and also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Explanation of the study and procedure

This study is designed to explore how Thai HEIs have responded to the regional integration project called ASEAN and the changes associated with the creation of free flow of professional and skilled labour under ASEAN MRA-TP. Participation in this research involves a face to face interview which will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The interview is conducted by Miss Paranin Jotikasthira, a Ph.D. student, Department of Education, University of Bath with audio recorded.

Confidentiality

The information gathered during this study will be kept confidential subject to data protection practices. Only the researcher will have access to the data information. There will not be any identifying names and institution of participants and will be replaced by made-up name in any writing or presentation related to this study. Any information which might potentially identify the participants will not be used in published material.

Withdrawal without prejudice

Participant in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw and discontinue participation in this research at any time and also free to refuse to answer any question the researcher might ask you.

I have read the above information. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix D

Code Name	Gender	Position	Years of Experiences	Degree	Participating in ASEAN MRA-TP activities
University A					
Interviewees AM1	M	Management	>13	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AM2	M	Management	>18	Master	Curriculum
Interviewees AS1	F	Lecturer	>25	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AS2	F	Lecturer	>7	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AS3	F	Lecturer	>18	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewees AS4	F	Lecturer	>12	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
University B					
Interviewee BM1	M	Management	>10	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee BM2	F	Management	>7	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BM3	M	Management	>7	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BS1	F	Lecturer	>8	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BS2	F	Lecturer	>6	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee BS3	F	Lecturer	>10	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee BS4	M	Lecturer	>6	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee BS5	F	Lecturer	>10	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee BS6	M	Lecturer	>6	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee BS7	M	Lecturer	>12	Master	Curriculum
University C					
Interviewee CM1	M	Management	>17	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee CM2	M	Management	>12	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CM3	M	Management	>15	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CM4	F	Management	>10	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee CS1	F	Lecturer	>10	Ph.D.	Curriculum
Interviewee CS2	F	Lecturer	>7	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CS3	F	Lecturer	>18	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee CS4	M	Lecturer	>6	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CS5	M	Lecturer	>23	Master	Curriculum, Training
Interviewee CS6	F	Lecturer	>5	Master	Curriculum
Interviewee CS7	M	Lecturer	>15	Ph.D.	Curriculum, Training
Other					
Interviewee D1	M	Policy analyst	>15	Master	HE Policy and Strategy
Interviewee D2	F	Education Officer	>20	Ph.D.	HE Standards

Code Name	Gender	Position	Years of Experiences	Degree	Participating in ASEAN MRA-TP activities
Interviewee D3	F	Gov. Officer	>15	Master	All Issues related to ASEAN MRA-TP